THE Hudson REVIEW

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A Reading of The Magic Flute

SHIRLEY ANN TAGGART:
Ghosts Like Them—a story

MICHAEL MCGUIRE:
The Shadow of the Mountain—a story

ROBERT S. CLARK:
Tannhäuser and Don Carlos

VERNON YOUNG:
Declarations of Waugh

Poems by HILDA MORLEY, STEVEN HELMLING, ELIZABETH KNIES.

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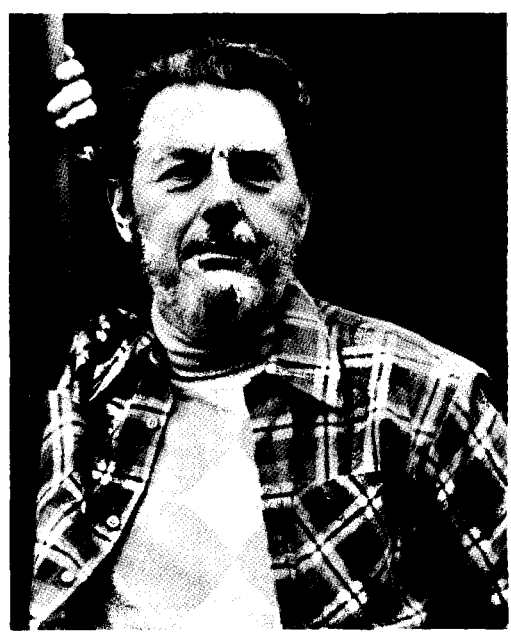

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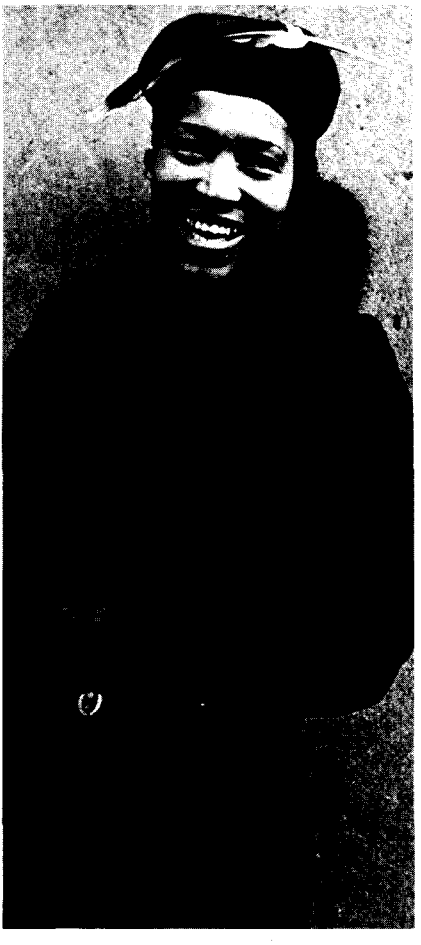

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JEAN STAROBINSKI

A Reading of *The Magic Flute*

THE MAGIC FLUTE IS NOT A WORK THAT WANTS for commentaries. Goethe said that it lent itself to heterogeneous appreciation, furnishing simple pleasure to the mass and yielding its hidden treasures to the initiate. . . . Schikaneder's spirited libretto is indeed capable of holding naive listeners enthralled even as it weaves a complex allegory upon which the system of masonic dogmas and rites sheds considerable light (without elucidating it through and through, however).[1] Beyond the literal and allegorical meaning, Mozart's music gives the opera a further dimension of mystery and significance, a dimension that eludes interpretative discourse while provoking no end of it.

Certainly the central myth is that of the couple: the initiatory course is a twofold progress leading to knowledge and to the highest love. Ordeals suffered along the way represent both the price to be paid for accession to such knowledge and the obstacle to be surmounted so that love may shine in all its glory. This venerable theme keeps turning up in fresh incarnations. We know, for example, that *The Woman Without a Shadow* (1919) reworks the same myth, and that Hofmannsthal and Richard Strauss had in mind *The Magic Flute* and Goethe's abortive sequel to it when they collaborated on their opera.

Once we have noted that *happiness* and *knowledge* cleave together, it behooves us to attempt a complementary reading, one that will raise a new question and bring to the fore an aspect of the opera hitherto insufficiently explored. No doubt the political ethos that marks our age disposes us to find politics wherever we look. In this case, however, politics or power—for *power* is what concerns me here—is not an illegitimate topic imposed from without by interpretative violence. Though current, it is not anachronistic. Let us remember that the *Singspiel* of Schikaneder and Mozart dates to the

[1] Cf. Seigfried Morenz, *Die Zauberflöte,* Munster-Koln, 1952; J. V. Hocquard, *La pensée de Mozart,* Paris, 1958; Jean and Brigitte Massin, *Mozart,* Paris, 1959; Jacques Chailley, *La Flûte Enchantée, opéra maçonnique,* Paris 1968; Alfons Rosenberg, *Die Zauberflöte,* Munich, 1972 (first edition 1964). Note P. Citati's introduction to Mozart-Schikaneder, *Il flauto Magico,* (German and Italian text of the liberetto), Milan 1975, as well as January-February 1976 issue of *L'Avant-Scène* (Paris), devoted entirely to this opera.

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French Revolutionary era. In a figurative way it poses and resolves the problem of authority and of its conceptual basis. If we pay close attention, we hear the word power repeatedly uttered in conjunction with words that speak of love, of happiness, of knowledge.

The major conflict, indeed the sole conflict, is that which pits the Queen of the Night against Sarastro, high priest of Wisdom and of the solar principle. On this conflict everything else hinges—first of all the happiness of the couple Tamino-Pamina, and secondarily the fate of Papageno, who eagerly awaits a companion. Thus, three couples, each occupying a discrete level of reality, manoeuvre before our eyes—though not without the assistance or resistance of minor characters who owe allegiance some of them to the Queen and others to Sarastro: the three ladies, the three boys, the slaves, the priests, the guardians, the men in armor, the Speaker, and, more substantially drawn, Monostatos the Moor, an embodiment of the treason and dark desires born in one who (as Sarastro's rebellious slave) wields delegated authority.

I shall have recourse here to an artifice and examine the question of power as it bears upon each of the three couples in turn. I shall, moreover, follow an ascending order and move from low to high, from the inferior level to the superior, from an instinct akin to animality to supreme wisdom.

Let us begin, then, with Papageno—the role that Schikaneder, Mozart's librettist, reserved for himself. What he emblemizes is the part of man that will not accede to initiation, a vital energy as raw as it is spontaneous. Thanks to Papageno, buffoonery alleviates the development of the solemn allegory. Thanks to him, droll scenes alternate with pathetic moments. This rapid fluctuation of mood pleased Goethe who deliberately sought to bring off the same effects in the outline of what would have been, had he finished it, *The Magic Flute, part II*. From open-hearted fun to the mysteries of the universe the distance is vast and the oscillation abrupt. But in swinging from anguish to laughter, from introversion to light banter, the listener covers in all its amplitude the whole register of human emotions. He discovers himself in his entirety.

A bird-catcher who chatters like a bird even when his mouth is padlocked and who sports a bird's name, a man of nature (*Naturmensch*) incapable of disguising his cowardice, his gluttony, his appetite for girls, Papageno immediately gives away the *meaning* of his character. In every way, he is the man of spontaneous desire,

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of instinct, of shortwinded and artless thought. He delights in *passing himself off* as the serpent slayer and in allowing others to ascribe to him a *power* he does not possess. His vanity has him lay claim to simple physical power.

May we even speak of power where he is concerned? Perhaps we ought to define our terms more precisely. On the one hand, let us understand power (*pouvoir*) to mean *the effective authority that imposes an order*: by tact or force, by fair means or foul, power creates a *subordination*. On the other hand, let us call strength (*force* or *puissance*) the simple faculty whereby each individual manifests himself as far as his energies permit; such strength can remain self-contained and not seek to subdue over individuals. Of course, anyone who feels strong will feel tempted to make his strength a source of power by organizing a world amenable to his will.

In fact, Papageno reigns over nothing but the birdcage on his back. His power is therefore negligible and, since it imprisons animals, is innocently cruel. What he does have in abundance, however, is strength, the strength of elementary life with its uncomplicated joys, its scudding clouds of despair, its unfailing health (on his deathbed, Mozart asked that Papageno's arias, which radiate the very warmth of life, be sung to him). A simple concept resumes this absence of extensive power, this spontaneous strength: *immediacy*. In works written during the eighteenth century, the stock character of immediacy reappears at every turn, here as the good savage, there as Harlequin (or homologues such as Kasperl). Papageno, the man-parrot, is the good savage and Kasperl rolled into one.[2] This family of characters lives very near the animal quick, both by virtue of the instinct that inhabits them and of their daily contact with the animal world. Be it noted once again that immediacy is the issue, for its characterization places in bold relief the *mediate* character of the initiatory experience imposed upon Tamino and Pamina.

Papageno's acquaintance with the world is restricted to a limited sphere: what lies beyond his narrow valley is *terra incognita*. He is content to live in a straw hut and improvises life from day to day. While others build temples, all that this primitive does is hunt birds. Barter, a rudimentary economic activity, answers his daily needs. Above all, Papageno does not know what it means to postpone the satisfaction of desire. He hatches no long-term projects, so

[2] Chailley, who applies the alchemical code to the characters of *The Magic Flute*, notes Papageno's strong affinity to one of the four elements—air.

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that when a pleasure is offered him for the taking, he cannot imagine why it should be necessary to defer his enjoyment of it, to repress the idea of it, or to advance beyond. Rousseau depicted in similar terms the stupidity and bliss of the man of nature. But, ineducable though he is, Papageno exudes an elementary, erotic strength that promises happiness on a lower level. The pullulation of little Papagenos and Papagenas that husband and wife guarantee each other (to the accompaniment of Mozart's abundantly ironical music) bespeaks vital fecundity, animal health. If Papageno does not attain to spiritual life, his is the energy on the basis of which the life of the spirit can and must elaborate itself. Has it been said of Leporello that he is the double of his master, the shadow that Don Giovanni casts? By the same token, it may be said of Papageno that he is—in modern psychological parlance—Tamino's shadow or Id, that he is a partial identity—the most rudimentary kind—but the basis for constructing all the rest through effort, toil, the confrontation of obstacles.

One final remark about Papageno may serve to indicate how closely he hews to the conventional type of theatrical buffoon. The latter, though not directly concerned with the plot, intervenes in it as a help or hindrance. Indeed, his untimely interventions often play a providential role, which is to say that the buffoon unwittingly becomes a saviour or a rescuer. So it is with Papageno. Now Tamino's scout, now his messenger, the birdcatcher twice arrives just in time to save Pamina from the brutal clutches of the dark and violent Monostatos. It is, moreover, Papageno who reveals Tamino's love to Pamina before the lovers have actually met. Papageno's word is to the heroine what Pamina's portrait is to the hero: it announces a love object while making the absence of that object keenly felt. If Papageno lacks direct power, his innocence and gaiety—attended always by the Pan's pipe and glockenspiel—somersault him into indirect power: unbeknownst to himself, he will make Fortune's wheel spin around.

Let us now climb a rung and view the ground on which the Tamino-Pamina couple exists. Unlike Papageno's, their adventure reveals the conditions for a rise to power.

Tamino is the son of a prince. At the outset of the work, he is pursued by a monster. When about to perish, he cries for help, then faints dead away. And from this temporary oblivion he is reborn knowing neither where he is nor to whom he owes his life. He finds

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himself in a state of weakness or dependency—blinded by error, by illusion, by credulity. Power lies ahead, at the end of a road that originates in darkness.

It is he who will endure the intiatory ordeals. The libretto harps upon the theme of *equality*. At the same time, Sarastro tells him that his future, should he emerge from his trial victorious, will be to reign as a wise prince, *als ein weiser Prinz zu regieren*. The apprenticeship of humanity as a whole does not differ from that which prepares the individual for the exercise of fully legitimate power. Certain productions—Ingmar Bergman's comes to mind—make this justified assumption of power quite explicit by adding a last scene in which Sarastro effaces himself. The contrast between Tamino's original impotence and his final omnipotence is thus borne home as starkly as possible. Accession to power coincides with the couple's amorous fulfilment, with the complete spiritual maturity it attains after surviving darkness, silence, and misunderstanding. Inseparable from the highest amorous synthesis is the conquest of knowledge and power. All things good and wonderful merge in a single luminous whole that accommodates every juvenile fantasy.

We know that Tamino's successive ordeals correspond quite closely to the itinerary prescribed by the masonic rite. There is no need to discuss the successive steps of the walk through the labyrinth. For present purposes, the symbolic detail that attaches to each is less important than the very principle of a probative course—of a voyage in which the hero is called upon to marshal such strength of soul as he did not know he had and which henceforth becomes inalienably his.

If the masonic religion hoped to prepare a new age of the world, at the same time it stocked itself with the most ancient truths. For its ritual of proof or trial, it borrowed from the mystery cults of antiquity, without neglecting certain practices of medieval chivalry. This symbolics of the voyage toward truth or toward sainthood was a form that Enlightenment thought could utilize ready-made to depict the progress of the voice of consciousness, the patient movement of Non-Reason (errant, disarmed, animal-like) toward Reason (stable and master of its power). The "novel of education" or "of moulding" tells in narrative form what *The Magic Flute* conveys in the mode of solemn and magical lyricism. The Abbé Terrasson's novel, *Sethos,* to which the libretto of *The Magic Flute* owes a great debt, is precisely that: the pedagogical argument takes ancient

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Egypt as its fictional framework and the temple of Isis and Osiris as its lectern, its author—a staunch partisan of the moderns—forging a singular compromise between archaic myth and the new rationalist philosophy. Rousseau's *Emile* and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* trace through the contemporary world the itinerary of apprenticeship negotiated by beings who thereby gain possession of their freedom. And legion were those who, during the same period, imagined that such an education, which would transform bewildered mind into Reason fully cognizant of what it wants and what it is—that such an education could be imparted to all humanity. The myth of human progress, which emerges at this very moment, bestows upon a collective destiny the promise of freedom which the pedagogical novel confines to the evolution of an individual. The series of ordeals has its counterpart in the laborious march of history toward plenitude and toward the reconciliation of all those whom ignorance had divided. In the libretto of *The Magic Flute* the promise made to Tamino and Pamina is intoned on two occasions in the same language. The happiness that awaits them is the happiness of the entire earth—a new Golden Age. At the end of Act One, the priests sing:

> When virtue and equity
> Spread glory upon this noble way
> Then earth is a realm of heaven
> And mortals resemble Gods.[3]

And the three boys will reiterate the first two lines at a crucial moment (Act II, scene 26) when they herald the sun's imminent triumph, the ruin of superstition, the return of "sweet serenity" (*holde Ruhe*). "*Soon* the earth will be a celestial realm." I would propose that this line conveys an eschatological promise perfectly consonant with the myth of dawn and of solar victory that imbued the first years of the Revolution (it has been said that eighteenth-century Freemasonry, whose program formulated purely ethical goals and not political ones, adumbrated a radical critique of the statist institution, and that the scope of its action was the more political for its ostensible indifference to politics; the historian Reinhart Koselleck contends that in making no political provisions it thus drew a blank check on the future).[4]

[3] *Wenn Tugend und Gerechtigkeit/Den Grossen Pfad mit Ruhm bestreut,/Dann ist die Erd' ein Himmelreich,/Und Sterbliche den Göttern gleich.*

[4] Reinhart Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise*, Frankfort, 1966.

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When the *Singspiel* ends in glory, one can measure the distance traversed since the initial moment of disarray. Present day psychology would call this distance sublimation, for what sent Tamino off on his quest in the first place was amorous desire awakened by the sight of the portrait of Pamina which the Queen of the Night gave him. Undaunted, Tamino will brave every peril to join the being whose image seduced him. He will do anything to free her from Sarastro, whom the Queen describes as a tyrant. The force that first embroils Tamino in the adventure is propulsive in nature. On two or three separate occasions, Schikaneder employs the word *Trieb* ("drive"), with whose meaning in Freud's lexicon we are quite familiar. But to avail ourselves of another Freudian concept and to say that Tamino's initiation consists entirely in the *sublimation* of his first impulse is not to thrust upon *The Magic Flute* an incongruous interpretation. During his voyage, the hero will change his goal, he will aim higher without for all that renouncing the original object of his desire, which becomes what psychoanalysts call "a secondary gain." "May the knowledge of wisdom be my victory and sweet Pamina my reward" (Act II, scene 3). Amorous possession thus ceases to be the *immediate* aspiration. Tamino consents to delay it. He allows the risk of death and the stricture of silence to come between him and his inamorata. At the price of separation and pain, he will obtain in full measure the presence for which he longs. Thus does renunciation (something unknown to Papageno) open the dimension of a future. One must impose upon oneself the most onerous frustration in order to give proof of inner *strength,* and thereby gain possession of a *power* that carries far beyond the narrow circle of immediate satisfactions. Henceforth, the love of Tamino and Pamina has a past and future; now that it has transcended despair and death, nothing more can endanger it.

Where to Tamino the momentary break is an obligation he consciously endures in hope of future reward, to Pamina it is, on the contrary, an incomprehensible catastrophe. The heroine's pathos is bound up with the relentlessness of a persecutory fate which makes her, before the glorious dénouement, a victim whom misfortune hounds without her understanding why this should be. She has lost a beloved father—a mysterious personage whose memory she holds dear. She has been torn from her mother, the *Sternflammende Königin,* whom she persists in believing affectionate. She is the captive of a powerful man unknown to her—Sarastro—who has not divulged

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his benevolent intentions. She must suffer the brutal designs of Monostatos. Tamino, by whom she believes herself loved, remains silent, then bids her an ultimate farewell. She will try to take her own life, but the three boys prevent her from doing so at the last moment. Here, frustration figures as something massive, incessant, reiterated. Around Pamina, there prevails the atmosphere of a Gothic novel or a Sadelike imagination: the white daughter of a darkly shrouded mother, she belongs to the sorority of Fuseli's martyred sleepers, of all those frail creatures held prisoner in the medieval dungeons or Inquisitional cells that late eighteenth-century fiction invents and reinvents. This pathos of *captivity* gave rise to a specific type of lyric work—the "opera of rescue" (*Rettungsoper*)— one of whose earliest examples was Berton's *The Rigors of the Cloister* and one of whose last would be *Fidelio*. Before Pamina, another Mozartian heroine, Constance, had known this captive destiny in *Abduction from the Seraglio,* and her fate invited reflection on *the abuse of power*.

But the series of griefs inflicted upon Pamina also constitutes a trial. It is also an initiatory voyage and therefore a twofold voyage, for even as she passes from the nocturnal, feminine domain of her mother to the masculine, solar domain of Sarastro, she traverses night and death, which makes her worthy of crossing the sacred threshold (alongside Tamino). Suffering endured is the price paid for the conquest of a power. During her last test, Pamina takes Tamino's hand and guides him. In the form it assumes once the trial has purified it, love is no longer an aimless outburst of instinctual energy; it is, on the contrary, the directing force, the strength which guides through fire and water. Pamina sings:

Ich selbsten führe dich
Die Liebe leitet mich.

I myself lead thee
Love guides me.
(Act II, scene 28)

Besides love, there is another conductive force, however—the magic flute, which materializes at this juncture to protect the couple and open the way. When the verb *leiten,* whose subject was love (*die Liebe*), is reiterated, it takes as its subject the flute. Pamina sings:

Nun komm und Spiel die Flöte an
Sie leite uns auf grauser Bahn.

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Tamino, take the flute, make its song heard
And may it *conduct* us along the somber path.

Then, both together:

Wir wandeln durch des Tones Macht
Froh durch des Todes düstre Nach!

By the power of music we accomplish our march
Joyous, across the obscure Night of Death!

It is here that we learn, through Pamino, the origin of the flute confided to Tamino by the Queen of the Night. "My father fashioned it, at an enchanted hour, in the deepest depth of the heart of a millennial oak." One is tempted, in the spirit of modern psychology, to consider the magic flute the emblem of the archiac father who vouchsafes the new couple his blessings and protection: the conquered strength dates back to an ancestral, wholly beneficient past. But this psychoanalytic reading would fall wide of the mark if it had us overlook the interpretation that seemed glaringly obvious to Mozart's contemporaries. To them, the flute signified harmony, and not only the harmony of the couple, but, much more fundamentally, *the harmony of the world*. As the fundamental ordering principle, harmony is power *par excellence*. It is through harmony that chaos can become an order. In his theoretical works, Jean-Philippe Rameau repeatedly made the point that "the law of harmonic generation" produced by the vibration of the sonorous body was the fundamental *secret* of the cosmos: from it, all other proportions derived, whether geometrical, optical, or moral. Freemasonry generalized this idea. Mesmer the magnetist gave it a medical application. According to his lights, animal magnetism is a universal fluid that acts rhythmically upon the universe and upon our bodies. Magnetic treatment would restore harmony between body and world. Certain dyed-in-the-wool mesmerians felt that good health in an individual was unseemly when the social body as a whole was out of tune. (Need we recall that Mozart knew Mesmer? that Mesmer commissioned *Bastien et Bastienne*? that the *mesmeric rod* is a comic accessory employed by Despina in *Cosi Fan Tutte* to cure the Albanians of their mock poisoning? that, in a more serious vein, the bewitching effect that Tamino's flute has upon animals at the end of scene 15, Act I invokes an Orphic precedent?. . .) The flute and the power of music are reserved for the last

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and most difficult test. Thus, insofar as harmony represents the law of the world and the moral rule, Tamino's instrument is not a mere resource at his disposal. It is power itself—a lenient, non-violent power of which Tamino is but the officiant and by which he lets himself be guided. What the ultimate trial *represents* is not only the triumph of love. It is the triumph of music and musicians.

If it were incumbent upon me to be philosophically coherent, I should find myself in a very awkward position indeed. I have just stated that the superior power, which asserts itself and triumphs, was the power of harmony as symbolized by the flute. Such power is impersonal; though served by a person, it nonetheless remains distinct from its servant. But I had previously argued that strength of soul, the strength of refusal mustered against immediate desire, the strength that assumes and internalizes the risk of death—evolves into power, into an aptitude for imposing an order on others (having begun by imposing such order on the self). In this case, power is inseparable from a person, its source resides in the individual's "virtuous" consciousness, which evinced an ability to deny itself and to survive the most rigorous ordeals. Do we not have here contradictory propositions as to the source or the anchorage of power? If so, we must recognize that the dream (or utopia) of Enlightenment thought was to reconcile these apparently contradictory propositions. And nowhere is the dream more clearly set forth than in the person of Sarastro.

Where does authority abide? Where power? There are two possible answers. The reassuring one has it that power belongs to the gods—Isis and Osiris—and to the stellar order; the source of authority lies among the great eternal and impersonal entities: light, wisdom, virtue, love, harmony, and so forth. To hold sway among men, the transcendent law requires an interpreter, and only irreproachable beings can exercise this function: Sarastro is an *officiant,* nothing more. In vain does this theocracy (as opposed to the one that invokes "revelation") claim to be *rational,* however. How can it ward off the suspicion that Enlightenment thought incessantly brings to bear upon kings and priests? And here we may introduce the second, less reassuring answer (unquestionably heretical from the viewpoint of *The Magic Flute*'s intentions): he who would pass for the interpreter of a universal power is seeking only to make respectable, and intangible, the decisions emanating from his personal will and dictated by his own interest. I shall put

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the matter succinctly: Enlightenment thought rebels against the arbitrary exercise of power by absolute monarchs; it means to translate such power to a universal and impersonal level (natural law, reason, the general will, the people, etc.—the submission of all to one impersonal law constituting the very definition of equality), but it must cope with the problem of execution. What qualifies a given individual or group to execute the universal principle? The Enlightenment's traditional indictment of clerical imposture could have been levied, *a fortiori,* at Robespierre when he represented himself as the highest officiant of the cult of the Supreme Being. . . . Let us return, however, to our description of Sarastro's power.

Sarastro (whose name, we know, plays upon that of Zoroaster or Zarathustra) is not a king but a high priest. No one stands above him save the gods and their laws, of which he is the interpreter. In his famous aria, *In diesen heiligen Hallen,* "beneath these sacred vaults," he affirms straightaway that vengeance is unknown among initiates—*kennt man die Rache nicht.* Now vengeance is precisely the expression of a *personal will.* The initiate has abdicated this will (or passion) in order to be the servant of a humane and disinterested law (the adversaries—the Queen of the Night and Monostatos—know nothing but egoistic passion, jealousy, spite, the desire to murder, to wreak vengeance).

Keeper of a magic talisman—the "sevenfold solar circle," in which the number 7 extends the seven notes of the scale to planetary space—Sarastro possesses several of the divinity's attributes. His sight encompasses all places and all epochs. Like the divinity, he himself has no history (neither, at the opposite pole, does Papageno, since all his schemes are of the moment, dictated by the physical appetite alone). No ill can befall him, no danger threaten him. He has conquered in advance. His power immediately subdues the Queen of the Night (*steht in meiner Macht*). He knew beforehand that Tamino and Pamina were destined for each other. The felonious enterprises of Monostatos do not escape him. He is privy to the secret of hearts. In the marvelous trio where he imposes separation upon the lovers, he foresees that they will eventually reunite. *Wir sehn uns wieder.*

This last-mentioned example calls to mind Rousseau's *Emile,* where a preceptor separates the titular hero and Sophie, knowing—knowing as no one else knows—that the farewell he witnesses is setting the stage for a joyous reunion. Like the Rousseauian pre-

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ceptor, Sarastro secretly governs all the action: he harbors his plan, which is not revealed until it has come to pass. In it, he makes even the enemy work to his advantage. Negative powers serve him without knowing it. He is therefore possessed of such power that he need never have recourse to violence. Repeatedly he utters the words *führen* and *leiten*—"to conduct," "to guide"—which ring forth like manifestoes of his power. His orders are carried out to the letter by a swarm of priests, guardians, and messengers who acclaim him while praying to the gods. This personal homage is so hyperbolic as to suggest what we in the twentieth century would call a "personality cult":

> *Er ist es dem wir uns mit Freude ergeben.*
> *Er ist unser Abgott, dem alle sich weihen.*
>
> It is to him that he joyously submitted.
> He is our idol, to whom we all consecrate ourselves.

A quasi-divine, omniscient pedagogue whose hidden hand guides events, Sarastro belongs to a family of characters in whom Enlightenment thought, beginning with Fénelon's *Télémaque*, projected its dream of an effective wisdom that could guide mankind toward knowledge and happiness. Today there are those who irreverently wonder whether these beneficent personages are not "authoritarian personalities." Given their "ploy" of offering young people power in recompense for self-government, are they not, despite all their benevolence, "manipulators"? (I purposely use the mythological vocabulary in vogue, this mythology being one of desire and dream which holds any rational constraint to be tyrannical.)

It is on the *symbolic* level, however, that the figure of Sarastro emerges full blown. His conflict with the Queen of the Night is primarily the conflict between light and darkness, and secondarily a conflict between masculinity and femininity. Of all the characters, the Queen of the Night is most difficult to construe. What does she stand for? The Catholic Church and, more broadly, the political powers hostile to Freemasonry? Or the feminine lodges that rivaled the masculine?[5] Or again, the spirit of evil? I shall offer no new interpretations here. I accept the literary image of a cosmic power—the starry night aglitter with infinite riches. I also accept the view that she is the "bad mother" (the "acid-bosomed" mother) who, to win back her power, would sacrifice her daughter

[5]This is Jacques Chailley's thesis.

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and lay her in bondage to the heinous Monostatos. Among other symbolic attributes of Night is the *veil*. Not only are the ladies who wait on her veiled, but the stratagem by means of which she attempts to recover what she has lost is a *veiling* activity. She maligns Sarastro and the initiates, letting it be known that they are hypocritical imposters and monsters. Tamino and Pamina will have passed their first test when they lift the veil of lie that hides from them the true face—the human and friendly countenance—of Wisdom's adepts. Even when this veil is dissipated, there lies ahead the entire series of obstacles interposed between them and a truth against which frontal assaults cannot avail. . . . Initially benign, then seen to be hostile, the queen is a dramatically effective character. She helps and hinders by turns, thus multiplying the illusions, the errors, the obstacles that prolong the initiatory voyage and enhance the value of the ultimate triumph.

The victory is glorious only in proportion as the adversary is powerful. The queen's "original" inferiority could therefore not come to light straightaway, and the best means of not showing her conquered in advance was to make her seem, at first, a generous and auspicious power.

Blackened in the person of the queen, femininity finds its revenge in her daughter Pamina, though such revenge entails submission to the initiatory law, which is a masculine law.[6] Woman is made welcome as Pamina but cast out as the queen and her auxiliaries. When the young people are reconciled to each other, the dark widow, the sublimely tuneful witch, disappears—for good and all it would seem. She, along with Monostatos and the veiled ladies will have served merely to underscore Sarastro's triumph; one can follow, *against a background of shadows,* the dawn of day, but when the sun bursts forth, night is routed. To translate this into moral and political terms, what needs be invented is a negative principle sufficiently energetic to explain why the light of justice does not instantly flood all hearts. Since the human world is not yet radiant, it must be that the Prince of Darkness offers determined opposition (here the prince figures as a princess of darkness, but it's much the same). Every eschatology, every utopia must conjure up the face of an adversary and impute to it the delayed advent of universal happiness. Every utopia is thus Manichean. As it happens, Manicheanism derives from "Zoroastrianism" so that Sarastro could not be more felicitously named.

[6] A point on which most commentators insist, particularly J. Chailley.

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A luminous glory resounding in E flat, the key dear to Freemasons, fills the ether at the end of *The Magic Flute*. It is the Parousia, the end of time. A sequel would seem quite unthinkable, and yet a sequel is precisely what Goethe had it in mind to write—an analogous work for different musicians. How did he set about doing this?

When we consider the myriad works produced round about 1789 that endeavor to impose the image of triumphant light, of clarity victorious in its struggle against the shadows, it becomes apparent that among great artists the darkness is never completely expelled. In one way or another it comes stealing back.[7] Mozart and Schikaneder knew it full well, since they made the tenebrous Monostatos a servant of Sarastro (one might say, in a term borrowed from Jung, the *shadow* of Sarastro). Likewise, on the political scene, the French Revolution conceived itself, at the outset, as the great dawn of the human species, then allowed itself to be undone by suspicion, by the obsession with an inner enemy, by the terror ("Our goal is to establish an order of things such that a universal inclination toward the good may establish itself; such that factions may find themselves suddenly hurled upon the scaffold," St.-Just declared.).[8]

It was to this law—*the return of the shadow*—that Goethe had recourse in the fragment he composed as a sequel to Mozart's *Singspiel*. First we witness a massive triumph of Night. Monastatos, on orders from the Queen, has smuggled himself into Tamino's royal palace and seized the infant to whom Pamina has just given birth. Not being able to carry it off, he has enclosed it in a golden casket sealed with the seal of the Queen of the Night. The king and Pamina fall into despair. They mourn separately. That the infant may stay alive within his coffin, the latter must be carried night and day. Sarastro, for his part, must abdicate power, fate having commanded him to go among men and accomplish, outside the cloistered premises of the Temple, a year of pilgrimage. He is welcomed to the hut of Papageno and Papagena who have had no children and lament the barrenness of their union. Sarastro will hatch children from ostrich eggs—the *tour de force* of a disquieting science. The second scene (which was not to have been the last) transports us to a sanctuary and has us witness the opening of the

[7] See Jean Starobinski: *1789: Les emblèmes de la raison*, Paris, 1973.
[8] *Rapport relatif aux personnes incarcérées, 8 Ventôse, year 2.*

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coffin. The infant is alive. Goethe calls him Genius. But no sooner does this genius emerge than he takes flight and vanishes into thin air. Many themes that subsequently enter the second *Faust*—the Homunculus and the flight of Euphorion—are prefigured here. We do not know for certain what conclusion Goethe would have given his play, but the images he left us all suggest *centrifugal* movement: Sarastro departs from the Temple; the child, once delivered from his nocturnal prison, rises straight up and disappears. Where *The Magic Flute* ended in a marvelously convergent movement, in a radiant center, as if the world were at last about to clasp its immutable truth, Goethe's fragment places everything in doubt again. With the same mythic cast of characters, the same conflict between light and darkness, he wrought an enigmatic fragment that expresses the nocturnal, errant, problematical aspect of the modern world at its beginning. The questions raised go unanswered. Can Genius be an inhabitant of this earth? Can the wise man retain power? When fate bids the "master of wisdom" to go forth as a nomad or a pilgrim, the master's acquiescence turns upside down the certitude that Sarastro enunciated in his famous aria. After he departs, the chorus sings:

Es soll die Wahrheit
Nicht mehr auf Erden
In voller Klarheit
Verbreitet werden.
Dein hoher Gang
Ist nun vollbracht;
Doch uns ungibt
Die tiefe Nacht.[9]

> No longer will the truth be spread over the earth in its beautiful clarity. Your confident progress is now over. Deep night envelops us.

In our age of truth's exile, we feel that this desolate chorus speaks with our own voice. And that is why our eyes may fill with tears when Mozart sings the imminence of dawn—this *bald,* this "soon"

[9] Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke,* Jubiläums-Ausgabe, vol. 8, *Singspiele,* pp. 310–11.

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which has yet to illuminate our century. "*Die düstre Nacht verscheucht der Glanz der Sonne, Bald fühlt der edle Jüngling neues Leben . . .*"—"The sun's splendor chases away the dark night. Soon the noble boy will experience the new life."

[Translated by Frederick Brown]

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HILDA MORLEY

That Could Assuage Us

1

Who says,

my dear, my dear,

& has infallible hands

as would have

known for a thousand years

what way to

touch me

& with the wisdom

of his mouth

Who brought me

a red rose that night because I had

said on the telephone:

rose-petals,

that's what I want,

who comes so close

I thought to have given birth to

that dark-maned head

out of the Mediterranean,

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who says

when he sees me loving

of him: there & there you are,

who wakes

to lean his elbow on the bed, staring

to make sure I am really there

in the morning

2

As on that island,
over 15 years ago,
the sand lies whitely
against the sea
There are thorn-trees
here also,
driftwood & the delicate
brown shells deeply curved that I
found there,
but the sea is darker,
a colder wind blowing
It is
the 2nd of March;
it is another
continent: the ocean
& not an inland
sea
That time I celebrated
you, your birthday,
your fifty-seventh
& brought you wild figs in
my summer hat, wide-brimmed
against the sun

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(watched the old boat, dark-red
on the purple
of a sea Odysseus travelled)
& could find no sentence
to match my wishing:
that you might
live forever,
as the heroes
did in ancient times
who were
so much loved
(as you were—
I have
heard from strangers
of you: Yes, he was
a hero
Wordless,
I am driven
now to words,
unable rightly
to celebrate you even now,
to say exactly
how it was that you were so:
a bird of such unlikely
richness of plumage,
not to be recognized, almost,
as one of us—
in voice & gesture
of such rareness,
in whom existed
everything I may yet see:
all that can
yet be formed,
that forms itself & will take
form by us—that is incumbent
on us as a kind of forming:
degrees of wind shuffling,
their whispering,
pauses
of silence,
the delighted
movement of egrets floating

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& the divisions
in space that seagulls play with crossing
each other's boundaries,
levels of blue & paleness
in the sky, a gentleness
of sun,
my hand moving this pencil
on my notebook,
my mouth shaped to
remember you,
my eyes
remembering,
pulse of my heart dilating
& contracting,
indrawing
air, expelling it
from my lungs beneath this sweater's
blackness:
act of continuing life,
of mourning

3

No babies, no sons or daughters
for us,
no garden,
no house of our own with perhaps
a tree flowering for us in April,
or
a bush with berries on it, or any
of that
(except for a few years once,
in a borrowed way)
& upon us suddenly a violence
of fate, unleashing
of whips: Who was to withstand it?
In the end it was
you (the direct target) who did so

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better than I.
Home, then,
was completely inside us,
utterly
of us, nothing else,
so much that
I can almost find my place in it
still
now that you have gone farther
than ever away
Everywhere today I smell mushrooms,
apples & mushrooms,
even if
I can't see them
(I don't
see the apples)
the air is filled with
ripening smells
for it's
my month again of course & by now
I should know much better than
I do know—where I'm going
& what
my plans are exactly
In certain ways
everything is adrift still,
everything
simmers quietly—there is
no definition still, not clearly,
not enough
Lying in the grass here,
the butterflies surprise me:
pale-green,
white, end-of-summer butterflies
(as eleven years ago,
that August, we were
doomed by them
They astonish me now, whitely fanning
on the yellow dandelion
& the ants digging

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for forage where the grass is dry
& the sailing
of the dragon-fly in a tiny billow
of wind
There is a rasping, a cawing
in the bushes,
rooks are they or crows?

That my own life could take me
by surprise completely,
that I could be broken
apart & shaken & tossed back into
my suddenness

4

You who believed so much in
shapeliness,
the shape of
all things in nature,
the precision
of form,
erased now in this little
pile of ashes indistinguishable
one from another:
that beautiful
thinking dome,
the unerring
eye, the ears that chose, chose:
an electric
instrument furling the intricate
wing,
the voice following
(time of your health)
each sound inside you,
the pulse of you
(the kindness,
a body breathing

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its energy in fierceness that could not
be released
(those years of illness
all these must be put away now
in this greyness
almost intangible
& I who walk the earth
(once you said to me:
You will look on
my dead face
& I said: No)
seeking for what was
once behind those ashes
must find a place to put them,
near an old wall,
among a tangle
of bushes

5

It is the living who cannot
live without the dead,
who wish them
back,
who need their presences,
their hands,
as Orpheus
held her hand, Eurydice's,
to lead her
back to earth out of
the gulf of Hades,
as I
need yours
It is not so much
the dead
who need us
now
(as we think they do)

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& that reconciliation
we long for,
that knowledge
of each other
to the uttermost
which could assuage us—
they are
one step beyond it
& they suffer us
to long for them
& if they could
return, it would be out of
patience with us merely: their need to give us
comfort
For somehow an indifference
possesses them,
for all their tenderness,
& they see beyond us,
even if
what they see now seems to us
nothing

6

If there is an angel
of death
& I believe
there is
then I can wrestle
with him
What else can I
find to do?
What else have I been
doing
these fourteen
months or more I have known you
dead?
Even now I

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hear your voice in the rhythm
of these words & refuse to
give it any distance
There is no peace equal
to you,
none that
could match you
Let me be the one to haunt you
even when the angel
of death appalls me,
when I am toppled
by him,
even
when I think that I am not
strong enough to avenge you,
when he has me down

7

Until a light emerges
from the event,
the I Ching says:
Wait, be patient
But you were
full of light,
so that woman from Princeton
wrote after your death
(& her comfort—
that you were loved by
someone beautiful,
inside & outside
Could it be me she spoke of
then
(who have not seen her
a dozen years)?
who sit here now,
over twenty months since that extraordinary
moment, 4th of April, 1972

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when I
stood helpless
Later a light appeared
It shone & warmed me
Did I waste it?—do it
some wrong to trouble it?
Did I
obscure its brightness?
Did I frighten
it away?
This place is full of
rocks & pits & furrows
that must be
cleared away,
though it is simply
the room where you fell down & where I could not
make you stand again
There is a heaviness
of work to do that seems more simple
than it is
It is
March again
Two years ago
I should have brought you out
for walks in the March air
but had a hundred
stupid things to do to keep me
from it
This month of March I'll take you
out with me, so you can taste the newness
of the air,
the difference
in the light,
the freshness even
of this wind,
the wind of March,
all this with me, this time
(And what did poor Robin
do then?
Who sang as you did,
in any weather—)

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But we can walk into the cold & into
the warmth that follows it
together
Out of the act of
clearing,
out of a patience
with the event
there will emerge
a light

8 Also This

He loved mosses,
low-lying, half-hidden,
would marvel at them
when we walked in the woods that so few knew of
(the fires roaring in him,
also quiet waters,
delicate streams that so few knew of in him—
who he was:
who loved a small stone,
an extraordinary
shell unfurling,
curled back on
itself,
& in the spring's beginning
each leaf's greenness

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MICHAEL McGUIRE

The Shadow of the Mountain

He was already exhausted. The second trail up the mountain rose more steadily, if less quickly, than the first. The reins hanging unneeded over the horn, the horse was a moving platform of warm flesh and bone that followed the horse in front of him, the guide's horse, and the guide's horse went where he was aimed. He himself was a man's burden of hope and fear and memory.

What was she wearing? How did she wear her hair now? Was she twenty still, looking at him with full eyes? Love, she said, was the search of the human soul for completion. Sometimes the search is successful, sometimes not. To penetrate to the essential nature of the loved one is to understand life itself. Her words. Her essay, read to him on a wildly tossing airplane twenty years ago. He heard again her intonation, her voice. Love changes, she said, and she was right. He remembered the warmth next to his in the dark and he saw himself bringing that up, as positive identification, through a translator or in his own broken words, to some dark little chief of police, saw the man's teeth slowly becoming visible.

The first time they had been going to take their youth (or hers) to Tahiti. The idea came to them on the elevated train creaking high above the shadows of the city. Or it came to them holding hands on the corner of Randolph and State, in front of Marshall Field's, braving the wintry blast. Or it came to them in a little restaurant off Michigan Avenue called Le Petit Gourmet. It came with the aperitif and they talked of nothing else until the liqueur. He had hesitated, then decided. He made provision for his first wife, his children, and strode off with a suitcase listening to his heart.

Giggling in the passport office, kissing in taxis, that existence already a panorama shrinking behind them, like kids they dropped everything, sold everything and bought their tickets. Then the war interfered. Suddenly the French cancelled their visas and they were left standing with their suitcases.

"*Going* is somehow part of it, isn't it?" he had asked.

"Of course," she had said.

And they went to Mexico where they didn't have to worry about U-boats or Vichy French or whatever.

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The mad DC 3 dropping into air pockets over the Sierra Madre, in Chihuahua, already nervous, they learned what *cerveza* was. In Torréon, terrified, they got off to continue their journey by train. In Cuernavaca they rented a house. It was cheap then. In a time of disturbance, cautioned by their good Mexican neighbors that *gringoes* weren't safe on the streets, they barricaded themselves in the solid old sixty-dollar house and survived. After that he carried a .38 in his coat pocket. The one time the taxi driver and his brother took off with them down a dark street he didn't have it, but reaching into the pocket where he usually carried it and saying *hombre* in his deepest warning gutteral was just as good.

They had a child. The child had dysentery for a year and a day. Left alone for the briefest period, he would be covered with excrement when they returned. He didn't understand why he couldn't eat, never did understand. And the man remembered his healthy children in Chicago and wondered. But the child was beautiful, exceptionally intelligent—and easily dissatisfied. Some days he looked like him, other days he looked like her. He had a wonderful, deeply amused laugh you could hear in the garden, and waved his tiny arms and legs in time with any music. On the second Christmas the child died. It was buried in the hard yellow soil, in hallowed ground. The coffin was so tiny he carried it in his arms. They took it out in a taxi. The taxi waited, having agreed beforehand on the price.

Then they were just the two of them again. For a while they grew pale and lost weight. A certain amount of their substance seemed to follow the child. Then, slowly, their color returned, their energies revived. He decided he was still young. There was still time for this second life, possibly even a third. He began to study ruins, ancient gods, dead peoples. She began to keep a journal, events of her day, tiny sketches, watercolors. Then she was pregnant again, sitting in the garden, the long warm days of the Cuernavaca summer, full, waiting, feeding her child-to-be on poetry, folk tales, history, reading to him silently. Then it was her turn for dysentery. She lost the child one night. After that she was better, and said she understood their life was for just the two of them. And one afternoon, a week or two later, he heard a shot and ran upstairs to find her standing dazed in the center of the room, the .38 still smoking in her hand.

After that, they sat in the garden again. There was a new crispness in the autumn nights. And a new silence. And the absurd feeling of something missing, a feeling unknown to their first pas-

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sionate acquaintance. In the middle of the third year, they suddenly left. The crazy airplane ride, the *cerveza* well known by now, along with stronger stuff, the dizzy views of the Sierra Madre, and then El Paso, Texas, gas stations and ice cream, the dumb, dumb faces, the end of the war.

Twenty years later they were back, quieter, claiming less for themselves, ageing (her too). They had lasted anyway. His children now seemed as old as she. They had had a child who lived, conceived and raised in the big city, but they didn't understand him, he didn't understand them. Retracing the path of their first happiness, somewhat awash in the memory of that poetic time, their daring runaway youth (his too, though it had only arrived in his forties), they didn't mind the dream-like woosh of the jet. They had left the driving years behind them when they circled out of O'Hare, the cold hard lights of Chicago dipping under the wing.

The sixty-dollar house was gone. A highway had ploughed right through it. Mexico was a land gone mad with engineers. They went further, stumbling down the ramp in Oaxaca and Tuxtla Gutiérrez before the backfiring taxi wound away with them into the mountains, in the general direction of the Guatemalan border. The unfamiliar mountain Indians with their hard dark legs and beriboned hats seemed distant and picturesque. And they had a hazy impression of a stupid altercation at the ranch when, in spite of the universal respect for cash and prepaid reservations, they had nearly been turned away when they had to be led from the car for a long sleep before they could appreciate the violent rain, the flat-eyed men standing silent under the eaves, the horses waiting patiently under the trees.

At dinner the first night they sat across from each other, almost glad to be out of Mexico in a way, for the ranch was American-owned and Mexico was no longer Mexico. They ate their fill, not talking to the other guests, sure of their own image, not really interested in it anymore. Yet, looking through the cigarette smoke at each other, he saw a woman who had not arrived with him, who was still wandering behind her eyes, and she saw a man who was not the man who had carried her south twenty years ago.

And, after a while, they knew they had not spoken to each other either and they looked away, at nothing, at the antiqued furniture (the image of the ranch), the dark Mexican night outside the window, then back again.

"Well?" he said.

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She did not respond.

"Well, what do you feel?" he asked.

"Nothing," she answered immediately.

"You're here, aren't you?" He was aware of the warmth in his own voice, and the impatience.

"I don't know," she answered after a moment, and attempted a smile.

A large stone kicked loose by her horse clattered down the steep, flood-eroded trail, before sailing into the air, clearly missing the dark head of the guide. She heard it clattering again far below as he stopped, turning around in his saddle to look back up at her. Eyes that understood good luck and bad, she thought, cruelty, the joy of escape. Was he smiling? His horse, standing still, exhaled loudly. The sweat ran down its sides in long dark streaks. Facing forward again, the guide sat motionless, doing nothing. She stretched one sore leg, then the other. Her horse would move when his did. The valley, capped overhead in mist, lay open below. She could see the dark gash in its middle, the rocky hole the soil-colored water disappeared into after each sudden drenching, the water pouring into and off the mountain, leaving a different track for the horse to follow that day and the next.

They were moving again. It seemed straight down. She leaned back in the saddle trying to let her feet in the stirrups take her shifting weight as the somewhat rested horse picked its way towards the valley. That afternoon the guide had led her further than ever across the mountain. The Indian women, sitting in clearings with their goats and their children, had disappeared into the trees at their approach. Like the water, she thought, pouring down the mountain almost every afternoon, leaving nothing, not a pool, not a cupful for drinking. But little patches of corn thrived on oddly-shaped steep fields thrusting right up into the trees on either side of the trail.

That afternoon in the driving wind-pushed rain they had found partial shelter in the angular overhang of a fallen boulder. Corn grew absurdly all around it. They sat on their horses for warmth, their ponchos pulled over their heads, not looking at one another, the guide silent, immobile, unconcerned. After the rain a young hummingbird had landed on her head, its little feet clinging in her hair until it flew away, whirring, vertical, already graceful, its fire-red throat flashing in the sun. And her heart flew up too, for the

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first time after such silence, such silent years, as if it had just been waiting, as if she were a child again and had been blessed. Once more the mystery had touched her, perhaps for only the second time in her life, as if she were a young girl still and could speak.

In the brilliant sun after the rain, in the clamor of the insects she couldn't see, and of the birds who saw the insects but left them buzzing, she and the guide had sat beside the horses resting, eating and drinking what he carried in his saddlebag. She had looked at all this difference: the close, empty sky, the house-size rocks, the trees. She had thought of the world before man, the sunless earth beneath the forest, the peace of empty places, and then humankind, and then the bird and time passing and herself. She had not looked at him when she spoke. She didn't speak his language. He spoke no other. She had felt him looking at her as a horse does, or a dog waiting for her to finish. And she had told him of her love, the house in Cuernavaca, her dead children, her bad shot with the .38, the bullet hole in the ceiling.

When she did turn towards him, he looked away, usually up, at nothing, but a nothing that held his eyes unmoving until she stopped looking at him. Eyes hard, unrevealing as stones, then soft, yielding, temporary like the brief pools of brown water before the earth swallowed them up. He would not pretend he understood. He would not be humbled by her unintelligible words. Then he had spoken to her, without anger, words that meant nothing to her arriving on his lips at the same pace, the same volume, one after the other until it was her turn to look away and down and she regretted speaking.

Once, at the door after a day-long ride, he had stood holding both horses in the sudden long rays of light that preceded the dark. She had made him wait, had hurried up the stairs and back, her legs exhausted and trembling, finally tumbling the little cans of evaporated milk into his hands. She had wondered where he lived—she had seen him riding back up the mountain at dusk—if he had a wife or child, if they would know how to open the cans. He had smiled then (she could hardly forget that), leading the horses away with one hand, the little white cans reflecting the sun in the other.

And one night a sound had called her, called to something in her, drawn her outside and she had stood on the cool wet grass in her nightgown listening to the shadowy figures of the horses moving about her in the moonlight and the mist, heard their teeth tearing

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the grass, had spotted her own horse moving amongst the others and slowly approached, standing at his side while he tore the grass near her bare feet. But when she put her hand out he had moved instantly away, lowering his head to eat again out of her reach, this horse who had carried her day after day, whom she had spoken to in a language she felt sure he understood. Then he was gone and she had seen the guide's horse and the guide, or the shadow of the guide made large by the blanket over his shoulders, the stillness of the night, the rifle in his hand. Then he was gone too. The mist settled more thickly. The horses were further away, still audible, still eating the fresh wet grass. And whatever called her out had held her standing until she was shaking with the cold and she returned to lie like a corpse in her bed, stiff and motionless until the first light.

The horse, throwing up its head, returned her to the moment. The guide stopped. Her horse stopping of its own accord nearly at his side, she saw the impassable breach in the downward plunge of the escarpment, the washed-out trail, and far beneath the shadow of the mountain, the now-familiar buildings, the tiny lights winking on already in the kitchen windows, the darkness in her own where she felt sure her silent thinking husband stared out at the fading light. Secretly she had hoped these summer rains would water him, that he would grow again in these green shadows, his spirit riding out alone again, the lone figure in that great valley, looking for her. And she felt like standing up in the stirrups, waving and shouting, a silly miniscule figure on the rim of the mountain, unheard and unseen. Then she noticed the flat eyes of the guide, unexcited, undismayed as he slipped to the ground, turning first his horse around, then hers, leading her back up the mountain in the sudden thickening darkness. And without protest, without a sound, she allowed herself to be carried into the night.

Was happiness possible on this earth? Three lives had at least raised the question. He was not ready for a fourth. When he had first arrived the head man, open to gifts, gave permission to wear the Indian costume. A day of that was enough. Better just to think oneself a fool. Further away than ever, that life always thriving around a corner, behind a door, he had sat in the marketplace with tears in his heart. And fear and mortality and irretrievable time.

In the beginning they had all ridden together, a long bumbling line strung out on the side of the mountain, the sun too near, even

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the bugs protesting, the vegetation screaming at him, glaring. He was too old for this, too pale, his body not conditioned. Should he fall off the ants would whiten his bones before the guide could turn his horse around to see what happened. Once a hummingbird, detaching itself from the sky, had suddenly darted to within five feet of his face, hovering there, looking at him, flashing its brilliant throat like the magic bird of . . . Of what? He thought of Montezuma, beautiful delicate man, under a canopy of green feathers, with golden soles on his shoes and lords to sweep the ground on which he trod.

At dinner a native of the conquering race would continue to lecture him on art, decorative art that masks and brightens the face of arbitrary nature: the floods, the droughts, the terrifying storms from the gulf. He would not mention the empty sky, of course, the empty sky that is worst of all and a wife looking up into it. He would listen and not listen, his mind a terrifying blank on which, if he could not and would never sing hosannas, he should be copying the stone work with a clenched and trembling fist, or inscribing the minute and exacting history of those last days . . .

He thought of teeming markets, a stone calendar turning up centuries later, of fabulous gardens, aviaries, the zoo (a well-fed human albino, strange life from the hot lands to the east), torchlight ceremonies on the temples and priests with blood-drenched stinking hair, the birds, a robe of feathers for a complex aristocratic ruler, the years passing, slowly at first, the courage, the history of a people, the city in the lake, then the years coming faster, tumbling one over the other, the recorded dates, soldier's journals, the end . . .

And now, where was the life that should be recorded? Once, in his forties, he had sensed all errors erased, all life before him, a brilliant sensous woman in his arms . . . He had *run* with their suitcases, *run* through the airport, just in time, the plane already warming up, the blast from the propellers whipping his hair, his suit, her long dress plastered against her body, his breath coming easily and deep. Oh, the strength of it! And now?

The rains always followed the sun, drowning the live chatter in the undergrowth, substituting their own steady drone. It had rained on him at the end of the line of dull uninterested horses. It rained on the red tiles now over his head, dampening the atmosphere still further, oppressing the valley beyond his window, the low roofs of the village in the distance, not a single human figure in

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sight though he could see miles, miles. Alone in one more temporary room, looking out past damp plaster walls, the rotting wooden frame of the window, he thought only: afternoon rain, the middle years, a wife riding on the mountain. His biological clock told him, among other things, that the time for her return had passed. He began to pace the room, slowly at first, then faster, burdened with the absurd illogical feeling that all had been lost in the last ten minutes. He tried to picture her, saw her riding naked in the rain, her legs around a steaming horse, and he was afraid.

It began to rain, the simple straight-down night rain, without wind, without sound, soaking everything, penetrating her poncho around her neck, soaking first her collar then her back, entering over the tops of her boots where there was a gap beneath the heavy rubber flaps, the damp rising on the sides of her legs and running down her ankles until she heard her toes squishing in her boots. The trail was levelling off. Sitting straighter in the saddle, shifting the pain in her legs, she felt the dark presence of the trees muffling the rain and watched the long rope with which the guide led her disappearing into the darkness in front of her. Still alert enough to hope that either he or his horse could see in the dark, tales of other nights told before the fireplace wandered in her mind: of the artist who had drawn the women on the mountain when the men were away, and of the men coming home and finding their women's souls aready possessed in his sketchbook, of the artist being packed out again without his head and the *Federales* riding in to subdue the mountain and riding out again at one-third strength, the mountain still wild and ancient and unsubdued.

Almost asleep, the cessation of sound woke her, the clatter of the trail gone, her horse walking on a bed of pine needles when an unseen branch slapped her across the face. A little later when he stopped, she did not move, still holding the side of her face, grateful for the end of motion, for the horse's heat rising under her poncho. Left in the saddle she felt her horse tied up by the other and the guide moving about her, invisible, almost soundless, until she heard the dry wood being dragged close, cracking and breaking, until she saw a spark and his cupped hands and a small still flame growing slowly larger, beginning to flicker and snap at the pine needles, the carefully added twigs and smaller branches.

A rock wall thrust up abruptly overhead, rising and falling with the fire, gray, cold looking—and dry. The interlacing branches of

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the trees were thick and low, protective, forming almost a pocket in the side of the mountain. The air was drier too, cold and still, the soft rain inaudible beyond the trees, only the breath of dampness drawing into the fire asserting its presence and continuation. She almost started. The guide, his fire made, was standing a little behind her watching her watch the rock wall and the trees. He moved slightly when she saw him, picking up a stone which he threw into a hole, a darker shadow in the rock she had paid no attention to, and listening, encouraging her to listen. She heard the stone click once or twice in its downward plunge, then nothing. He looked at her, apparently waiting. Perhaps he was amused by the hollow bottomless mountain. Perhaps he was amusing her.

He moved towards her suddenly, silently helping her off her horse, usually unnecessary, she usually stood a full head taller than he, lifting and setting her down as if she were weightless, and she crumpled at his feet, her legs unwilling to support her. Lifted and set down again near the fire she had to make an effort to believe or even remember his effortless strength. The magic of the heat penetrating her body lulled her. The steam rising from her legs was amazing, the glow seen through half-closed eyes, the ebb and flow of color in the depth of the wood was miraculous, a movement in her too, and the firelight, the still dry cup that held her in the side of the mountain, almost a vision.

Somehow managing to lift her head once, she saw the eyes across the fire on her, infinitely patient, almost warm. And seeing her head come up suddenly, her eyes wide open, he smiled for the second time in her memory, almost laughed, then signalled briefly with his hand for her to put her head down again and she did, falling at once into the surprising calm in her, the occasional sound of burning sticks further away and further, then gone.

He watched the night outside the window, thick heavy raindrops entering the light, rushing straight down, continuous as a cold shower left running, solid, silent beyond the glass, like streaks of water frozen in the air. He looked at the emptiness across from him, unable to displace the feeling of something unsaid still in him, something still waiting to be said. And he kept himself from running out into the rain screaming by the thought that she still *was,* was somewhere, anywhere, even galloping full speed away from him.

Dawn, an enormous flat sun rising right over him, blatant, white hot like savage unworkable metal. The shortcut to the mountain

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rose steeply overhead. They did not progress. The guide seemed the same guide who had taken his wife into the mountain: silence, a face inexpressive as rock and sparkling eyes. Nothing changed. No matter how high the horses climbed, the black hole in the center of the valley remained black. And the mountain rose straight and green and gray overhead, silent and untelling and alive. And his thoughts were like wind upon it, a wind that would overwhelm no trees.

At the steepest incline, where the uneven climbing of the horse worked the horn into his stomach, the guide stopped suddenly. In front of them the trail was gone, a distance of twenty or thirty feet impassable with or without horses. Above him he could see it disappearing into the first tall dark pines of the mountain. Without a sound the guide passed him riding back down the trail. After a moment staring hopelessly across the gap for himself, he turned his horse with difficulty and followed him.

The sun entered her nest for a moment, falling on the ashes of the night's fire, the stiff dried legs of her pants. Then it was gone. She lay still a moment, looking around her in the half-light, listening to the silence. The insects of the valley did not enter the forest. Pushing against the dry needles which stuck to her skin, standing painfully, brushing her hands slowly one against the other, she felt the soreness of one hip, one arm, the whole side of her body she had slept on motionlessly to save her warmth. Uncertain and without strength she stepped out from under the thick branches.

The horses were gone. The guide was gone. She found a warm rock outside her nest and lowered herself onto it to wait for his return. An hour later she was hungry, a hunger unknown to her body. Fingering the few dried-out berries in the clearing, she didn't dare put anything in her mouth. Suddenly thirst was worse than hunger. There was no water on the mountain. Water rushed through the soil, the crevices, disappearing into the dark insides of the rock, audible for a day after in the strange gash in the center of the valley before the silence and the birds and then the rains began again.

Of course. The guide had led the horses to the water. It was proverbial. They would return with full bellies and dripping muzzles. The man would smile holding out the clear cool liquid to her in cupped hands. She would drink like a horse, her head bent low, drawing the water silently through her lips. When the sun was overhead she remembered that the most foolish thing you could do

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was to leave the one spot where you had last been seen.

By late afternoon it was clear to her the guide was not returning. Thirst led her around the edges of the clearing, looking under the dense branches, feeling with her hands, squeamishly, then desperately. She saw herself finding the way to the valley suddenly, all at once, falling faster than it is possible to fall into the dark hole in its middle, praying that in its depths there would be cool black water. Forcing her way through, tearing her clothes, scratching her face and arms, she found the thick mud already turning gray and hard around the edges. Yet the handfuls she was able to claw out and squeeze in her handkerchief released a few drops of dark water into her mouth.

Thirst relaxing its total domination of her mind, she became aware of herself with hands and face she could not clean, crouching half-tangled in the roots and branches of a bush that had already scratched her several times. Like a child, she thought, forgotten at its play, unfed, with sticky hair. Until this moment she had always been the one withholding her presence, the one who needed to be alone. Once again solitude had happened to her, as it had happened only once or twice before in her life, and she was a young woman again with her children gone and out of reach, or a child herself, and without reason it seemed she began to cry, falling over helplessly against the bush as the pain of feeling surged again and again through her body.

And she found herself screaming absurdly, yelling her location to the mountain, to anyone, anything, the guide, a bird, then catching her breath as the silence rushed back at her and even the air in her lungs became still. Suddenly she wanted to leap up and run and just as suddenly, still half-tangled in the bush, she slipped to the ground and her eyes closed and the sun beat down on her head.

In her mind it was night, and she thought of the night and fire, of the three sacred stones of the hearth, of the god of fire and the god of the night sky who saw in a mirror of obsidian all the events of the world. And she saw herself, then and now, the life given up too soon, too easily, the long living death and a dream of wild youth and dead children, her own far-away eyes, her non-answers and unknown invisible love, the death spreading out from her like silence. And now, too late, the anger and the hate overflowing, her dry teeth grinding, scratching in her skull, her fists like rocks upon the ground, she pressed her face into the mud and lay still.

The horse had come to a stop. There was a fork in the trail. The guide had

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already dismounted. Taking a stick he scratched in the faded powdery soil. The fork was the lower end of a giant loop, the two ends of which came together further on. There was no telling which branch his wife would be descending. Now he would take one and the guide would take the other. Whoever arrived first where the trails rejoined would simply wait. At least that was how he understood it. But if he found his wife he was to return with her. The guide would know from the hoof marks what had happened, and he pointed at the earth, smiling.

An hour later the horse became unmanageable. Kicking it, slapping it across the head with the end of the reins had no effect. It only wanted to turn and gallop down the mountain. Perhaps he had missed the coming together of the trail. The shadows were lengthening, the horse's hooves rang in the silence. The insects were gone. There were no birds. There were no more little patches of corn, only the great rocks the trail wound among, this way, then that. Perhaps he had ridden into a dead spot on the mountain where, due to some peculiarity of light or air, nothing lived or moved or breathed, except himself and the horse—and the mountain, which brooded here, or silently despaired, or was depressed and without feeling. Then the horse rose and threw him and was gone.

He had landed on his face, it seemed, mostly on his chin, but blood was dripping from his nose and when he moved to touch it he found his forearm turned at an unnatural angle from his elbow. Sitting up in the middle of the trail, finding himself completely covered with its white dust, he had an almost overwhelming urge to stumble up and run back down the trail after the horse. Trembling all over, chilled with his own sweat and clenching his teeth against the noise they made, he looked painfully around him. Only the great rocks remained looming over him, huge and irregular, outlined against the coming dark, and the blood drops falling regularly from his nose seemed almost black on his white dusted legs.

Somehow, slowly, the silence entered him, and he sat very still, far from words, for once not even trying to think and just then noticing Venus in the west and another star or planet close below it. Removing his shirt with difficulty, he fastened the broken arm as well as he could to his waist, tying a knot with the other hand and his teeth. A few paces further he came upon the upper junction of the trail. The guide had not been there. His wife had not descended the other way. There were no prints of any kind.

Waiting, he knew, for nothing, standing still in the deepening shadows beneath the trees, he found himself wondering about the justice of the Indians, or whatever it was, and wondering what he was doing on the side of the mountain in the fading light and then the darkness. And he felt he heard her voice then, heard it distinctly, her own hesitant response, not terrified, perhaps not even afraid, just reminding, claiming his attention as only a whisper could,

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and the first heavy drops of rain were startling.

Moonlight still revealed the trail in the exposed places. He more or less picked his way under the trees. Discovering a sense of direction he didn't know he had, he felt the ranch distinctly at his back, somewhat below him, and the unknown, the mountain, growing larger as he approached, the night clouds gathering about its head, adding to its bulk, the mountain larger than the sky.

When she opened her eyes the east side of the mountain was in shadow and the sky overhead was a colorless void caught between night and day. Just before dark she crawled back into her nest, finding hurriedly with her fingers the few remaining twigs and tiny branches from the little pile the guide had used to build the fire. Her work gradually becoming visible, she twirled one small stick between her palms, drilling it Indian-fashion into a larger piece of wood upon the ground. The energy finally leaving her exhausted hands, it seemed at that moment to enter and glow in a few minute slivers torn off with her nails and set against the point of contact of the spinning stick. Her hands numb senseless things on the ends of her arms, blowing softly with pursed lips, she persisted until the first tiny flame seemed to appear from nowhere.

Later, standing still in the clearing, her fire behind her, she noticed the movement of the stars against the overhanging blackness of the branches and saw the night clouds forming above the rim and rising higher, adding to the shadow of the mountain. She was nothing herself at that moment, perhaps a waiting, a response. But there was no longer any citadel to guard, no golden past to preserve. Only this moment, perhaps best of all, and the mountain rising straight up, claiming, extinguishing the sky. In the first heavy drops she began to clean her hands, then her face. And in the last light from the stars the few berries glistened on the bush, as if they only revealed themselves at night or only then lost the dusty inedible look of day, swelling up with the water that fell from the sky. Snatching several, she hurried into her nest as the dripping suddenly became a flood, beating on the earth of the mountain, washing what it could of it away.

She set a piece of bark outside to catch the rain, reaching out for it several times, feeling the cold certain drops on her wrist and tasting a cool clear liquid she did not remember ever drinking before. She kept her fire small and steady, conserving her coals and wood, conserving also the unexpected feeling of being at home, of waiting for someone to come home to her.

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SHIRLEY ANN TAGGART

Ghosts Like Them

I. AUNT AMANDA JANE

Dear Amanda Jane, she writes. But she is too ashamed and guilty to continue. Ashamed of her contempt and fear of Amanda Jane, of the name Amanda Jane itself, the way it makes her think of black women in white kitchens, of Aunt Jemima. Although, she herself had loved Aunt Jemima once; as a little girl. A little girl dreaming on her aunt's front porch. Dreamed Aunt Jemima into the kitchen to bake special cakes for Angela Powers. But Aunt Jemima always turned in those dreams and viciously locked the oven door, so that she, Angela, would have to watch all the cakes turn black and burn to ashes. But when she woke up crying, Aunt Amanda Jane, sitting on that porch with her, would take Angela into her big arms and tell her sternly that bad dreams was God's reminder to sinners to make their peace with the Lord, and you was never too young to make your peace, to drive off the devil.

So how can she write Miss Amanda Jane Powers, Natchez, Mississippi, without feeling her soul burning and going to hell, without seeing her Aunt Amanda Jane with her straw hat and the Bible she couldn't read, rocking on an old weathered rocking chair on her front porch. Her Aunt Amanda Jane with her old black eyes fumbling in their yellow sockets, grabbing at Angela's face, her thin body, saying, "Amen, girl, Amen. I been there and back. Yes, Lawd, I been there and back." An old heavy black woman who is neither particularly impatient nor particularly peaceful with all her flesh, just a little tired of it, a little bored with it. "But it jes a house, Angela Ann, jes a house, honey, and the Lawd seen fit to give me a big one and if He seen fit to do it, then I seen fit to keep it."

Yesterday from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Angela Powers said, "How is she?" Her mother in Mississippi said, "She's an old woman, Angela." Her mother sighed into the telephone not in sympathy or resignation, but just as a habit. "But you don't think she'll die, do you Mama?" And she imagined her mother shaking her head, sad and intense and tired herself, before she said,

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"Honey, that old woman's been dead a long time now, her body just ain't believed it yet."

Ten years ago, she, Angela Powers, had sat on that old rotting front porch with her. A skinny nineteen-year-old girl from a poor Mississippi family of eleven children, all younger than her, yet home from college in those summers not to teach the children, but the aunt (who even then was well into her eighties, well into dying). A promising young woman on a full scholarship to a northern university, mysteriously compelled home into that fiercely hot summer sun in Natchez, to teach her aunt that the Lord didn't give her a fat body, a tired body; that, she, herself, made her body fat, made it tired.

Going off every day to her aunt's porch until her mother had said, "Lawd, child, what do you want with that old woman?"

And she would shrug her awkwardly tall and thin body and say, "I don't know, Mama."

But she had refused dates to sit on that porch with her, refused offers to drive into town with the tall predatory young men and sometimes older men, that hovered around her aunt's front gate, its broken-down condition, its peeling paint.

"I ain't never read me no books," was all her aunt had said, "and girl I ain't about to now." And then she sang, "Ain't about to leave you, Lawd. Ain't about to."

But Angela, always patient and polite, would continue sitting there reading out loud; sitting with her hair pulled painfully and neatly straight back from her high-cheekboned face, her continually washed and creamed face. Whose aunt had even said she could smell the mothballs and cleaning liquids still on Angela's sweaters and skirts. An old aunt whose voice would come on with a sudden power like a radio left on high, violently plugged in, and would sink into Angela's ears, anchor in her heart. "You stink, chile. You stink like a new bicycle and you gonna rust, chile. I knows, chile. I knows."

So sometimes she had hated her, her Aunt Amanda Jane; rocking there on that front porch that looked out over nothing now but broken rhubarb stems and ghosts of cotton plants. Hated that old woman singing and rocking there; picking at her decayed teeth between songs, and tapping on her chair a different beat from whatever songs she sang; as if there was such a multitude of songs, such an urgency to sing them, that they had had to appear in pairs, multiples. And how that had confused Angela, tangled up her

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words, until her aunt, alert to sounds, their patterns in space, had said, "Don't mumble, girl."

Yes, and hated her aunt's laziness too, her preaching from a rocking chair she never left to know one way or another what she was preaching about. Angela's mother had told her that Amanda Jane had been a flirt, a tease, but that men sensed that stubborn density of her soul, its competence and independence too; the Amanda Jane Powers who could go out in a heavy storm, her hair all done up for a date and a new dress just sewed; could go out and direct all her brothers and sisters to getting the animals inside and who brought in the last pig herself. So she had plenty of proposals, although one sweetheart was killed, but she said she wasn't about to marry him anyway, so who knows. But she never did get married, never did anything past 25, when her father died and left her in the house; had brothers and cousins and then nephews and then great-nephews to look after her. Took right to the porch, sewing in the beginning, and talking about opening a sewing place, selling her quilts and dresses, but then after awhile, just rocking and remembering. So, of course, Angela couldn't help pitying her, pitying the way her life slipped into the wood she rocked in; but pitying her from far away exactly like she thought some white northerner with a brand new color TV might, tuning into a documentary on the south, taking time to sigh and shake their heads before turning the channel. But then she would feel ashamed. Because, really, she loved her aunt.

But couldn't write to her. Even said she didn't have time to visit her the last time she was home. Said she didn't have time to see an old woman rock and sing and not even know you're there; an old woman who might even die right there, right in front of Angela herself. Although her mother had laughed that same mournful trying to be joyful sound of her aunt's songs, and said, "No, honey, you ain't about to see that." But when her mother had turned back to washing down the kitchen floor, she had said, "Then you wouldn't have to worry about death no more, child. You'd have to worry about the resurrection."

No, wasn't going over to see her aunt six months ago when she was home, until her mother had leaned her own deep, dark face into Angela's and said, "You my daughter, girl, my flesh and blood; but girl, you as cold as the north you live in." So it was fear that got her over those three-hundred yards to her aunt's porch; guilty and ashamed in that hot stagnant Mississippi air.

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Was it fear of her aunt dying, she had thought, or fear of an aunt who at ninety-five, wouldn't die?

Yet she loved her.

And was afraid of her. Of the way she sang, so loud and uncontrolled. Afraid of the wrinkles in her aunt's face, the wrinkles even in her faded white socks pulled down below her heavy black ankles. And Angela would become a little dizzy at this loss of moisture and life in her aunt's skin, even mirrored in her aunt's clothes, as if the woman herself had already left them, routinely and unsentimentally abandoned them, moved inward. Her Aunt Amanda Jane turning inward upon herself like a dead star in space.

In the last summer before she graduated from college, she had gone over to see her aunt and her aunt had said, "A woman's got to be saved, chile. She was His second thought and He wasn't yet done with her when the world got started. So she need a man, honey."

But she hadn't needed those men in Mississippi, men who hung around on a broken gate, smelling of chewing tobacco and a boisterous camaraderie. "Good afternoon, Mizz Angela. Ain't it a good afternoon, Mizz Angela. Now ain't it just a real fine afternoon?" Dragging out the word fine with their wide mocking toothy grins.

Her aunt said, "If a woman not saved by love and childruns, her soul jes dries up and dies, chile. Dries up and dies. Oh Lawdy, you can hear it crack. Yes, Lawd. Happened to women I knows. Women, I knows, chile."

So in the late summer afternoons of 1967 Angela dreamed she saw images in the haze off her aunt's front porch. Of her savior who would be the strongest, blackest man she had ever seen. One day washing dishes with her sisters she thought she saw him coming through the field in the back. But up close, she recognized him as a preacher and saw him put his arms around their mother who had run out the back door drying her hands on her dress. Angela stood stiff and still when her mother came back inside. "Was it . . . ?" And she was surprised at her panic, her fear, and her coldness. "Why honey, no," her mother had said startled, guessing her question. "It was Grandma Powers who went with the Lord." And she wondered how she could have forgotten her Grandmother Powers deathly sick in her bed and still reciting her tales of Mississippi that Angela's brother Latent, at 16, convinced of his pending importance and superiority, had generously vowed to write and

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publish. So that later, the preacher had said she had died slightly frantic, angry at the Lord for taking her too soon, right in the middle of that final story. The end lost forever in ordinary Mississippi dirt and rock.

But her brother, Latent, believed in ghosts, in his grandmother reappearing, in the ending being revealed to him. He believed in ghosts, more than in her, his sister, who he admitted was exceptionally bright, but whom he was convinced would get lost, become anonymous and harmless in marriage and fertility, like so many other sisters, all the sisters he had ever known. Impotent with their big bellies and their big breasts, he had said. But it was all right. Acceptable for women. Only men needed to commit suicide.

In the late summer evenings her savior committed murder and theft. In the movies downtown. Breaking up rocks on a chain gang with Sidney Poitier. Or maybe even Sidney Poitier himself. A man so strong she imagined she could smell his sweat, like hot burnt rubber, all the way through the paper movie screen in the concrete church basement on Farm Street. Heard his cry through the giggling and whistles, when he finally broke the rock, when he said in that fierce amplified whisper, his black face blazing with sweat, "God, I can't stay here. These men are dead. And I'm still alive." And when he was sentenced to die she dreamed that she was the woman he saw in that movie, the woman who turned his soul to love and repentence; and mystically, magically this saved her. She was saved.

II. ENRIQUE JONES

In real life she was also finally saved. His name was Enrique Jones, a tall, exotic looking black man who wore hand embroidered Swedish shirts and vests sent to him by a sister in Scandinavia, so that he almost looked like a shepherd, lost in the wrong land, the wrong contour of the earth, in the mountainless, flat, sea-level city of Philadelphia. Enrique Jones, her savior. His mother was Spanish and his father was black and the combination of strange bloods never quite jelled, so that Enrique never quite understood Spanish and never quite identified with blacks, with any of their rallies, their tears, their rage. He only understood rage in a purer, more impersonal sense and when he broke Angela's nose with his fist, he had cried. Gently and lovingly he tried to persuade her that it wasn't personal, that it wasn't even because he hated his job, hated

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collecting people's trash, because, he joked, even those rich, smart-assed politicians had to do that, all that wealth and power and they still had to take people's trash every day! And they couldn't even punch out at 4:00 either. Enslaved forever with other people's trash! And he would laugh heavily, heartily, at this irony until he had had too much beer or until his friends left or until he felt sick. And then he might hit her again, punch her in the stomach. But it wasn't personal, he would tell her; he loved her, god how he loved her. And then he would watch television, watch people in new clothes wander into ski lodges and unwrap fancy bottles of booze in front of a fireplace, and over their heads, wooden rafters, that someone could have rubbed their skin, their goddamn soul out polishing. And through those big glass windows was new snow; all white and clean like those faces, all those contented, uncluttered white faces smiling at him. And on another channel, doctors staring seriously, thoughtfully at patients; prescribing perfect treatments, exercises, love. White male doctors. Over 40. Fatherly and respected. And then suddenly they were younger. And then women. And now black. But all with the same smiles, all pointing fearlessly, confidently, to the remedy, the cure. But he could never quite focus on the cure, never quite concentrate on those prescriptions because he would be trying to remember when it started. When he first saw them. Those doctors. And it gives him a headache, a pounding and throbbing in his head trying to remember all those puffy, broken-up streets in his old neighborhood; his youth in those potholes, those bars, so cloudy and noisy with the same people, the same dudes, the same friendly slaps, the same angry punches. But the TV was always going, he remembers that, remembers the exact day they got color TV's downtown, has a good memory; but there were never black doctors, never, he would have noticed. And he can't imagine who snuck out, Jesus Christ, who would even think of sneaking out and masquerading as a doctor?

So he broke her nose, and her glass Christmas tree ornaments, and their daughter's wrist. When she left, he said it was personal, it was personal now. Very personal. He said, "Woman, I'll kill you if you leave." He said, "You hear? You hear that woman?" And his rage had finally taken shape, crystallized. But when she was out the door he ran after her, yelled from the sidewalk to her, "Get your fucking little ass out of here, woman. And don't you come running back. Don't you ever come running back."

And she could feel him behind her, watching her, trying to

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hypnotize her with his eyes, trying to pull her back to him. So she didn't turn around once. Not once. And then what? And then nothing.

III. ANGELA POWERS JONES

She just walked straight ahead and didn't look back. Walked into this apartment with Mandy, her nine-year-old daughter, and signed the lease, signed him out of her life, and she didn't cry once. Since then she hasn't seen him, doesn't want to, but hasn't bothered with a divorce the way the people in this neighborhood don't always bother with marriage, with written laws; the powerful inertia of all those words and papers that drive educated men to horror movies and roller coasters, to get going again, to get their blood moving again.

But she still lives in Philadelphia, a city with historic landmarks, the Liberty Bell. The cracks in the bell for when freedom starts to break apart, break down into slavery again. But when she married Enrique and had a child, there were things she had to do, meals she had to cook, love she had to give to a man who was her husband. And she didn't cry when he hit her, hardly moved at all. He said she was so good, even her body was so good, not crazy and out of control like his body; and then he would start to cry and she would comfort him. Other times he caressed her and said, "How do you live with me? How are you so brave?"

Didn't whimper or scream like her sisters did, five sisters still in that shack at home on that burned-out farmland in Mississippi with a hundred kids and animals and lovers running over them, keeping their faces down so close to the dried-up useless soil that they wouldn't leave because it wouldn't feel right, because that was their home. But with no way out for them anyway; no scholarships and no beauty. Their mother had said Angela was the only one about to get anywhere. And if she didn't get anywhere, her mother had said, no one she knew in the whole world would.

But once when he slapped her, slapped her hard, and then looked right into her face, into how hard she tried not to change that face, not to remember that slap, he had gotten angry and said, "Je-sus, woman. Are you human?" But she was always in love with him. She doesn't remember a time when she wasn't in love with him, just a time when she had to go away and not look back. Like going away to college had been. And now she dreams of walking in tunnels. Of

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doors being slammed shut. And this bothers her. Because wasn't leaving home, going to college, leaving a husband who beat her, weren't these good decisions? Wise decisions? Wouldn't psychiatrists agree with this, applaud her; so many people couldn't do that well. Couldn't just walk out of a life like that. Like she did.

But she still lives in the same kind of neighborhood, a neighborhood that is a little worn-out and neglected. A neighborhood starting to shrivel, crack, like old photographs kept too long, kept in too much light; as if the light from the city was too powerful for neighborhoods so close and unprotected. A neighborhood that could burn and turn to ashes, like something in a childhood nightmare that she can almost taste, that makes her uneasy.

So she sits on guard at her window on the fourth floor. Looking out for whole days while Mandy's in school. At the holes in the streets. The broken bottles and old tires in yards, wherever there are yards. At the collapsed buildings. The condemned buildings. At the collapsing wooden fence around a vacant lot across the street with "Jarcy and Jimmy '77" in big awkward red letters, and in a corner on that same fence, in piercing angular black print: "You die, man."

In the afternoons she watches the adolescent boys stand around and pass out plastic bags of drugs and put them in their jackets. Watches them push each other against the fence and laugh, imitating violence, but not violent yet, not ready in the daylight to try and blast the souls out of their own or each other's bodies yet; but excited, desperate to get out, to take off, to get away finally from so many people so close screaming into each other's hearts, or on hot nights, all vegetating in crowds outside on their steps like colonies of seals. She thinks that's what it looks like from up here, from her window.

And in the mornings she watches the prostitutes come home in their flashy clothes and heavy make-up. And the old men and old women asleep or drunk on someone's front steps. The most harmless people in this neighborhood and yet these are the ones that panic her, like dead fish washed up on beaches always do, as if there was some disaster just out of the corners of her eyes that could suddenly move in and destroy her. But she knows these old people are not dead, not even very dramatic, just lonely and tired. But she would like to take their pulses, listen to their hearts; shake their old bony shoulders right out of their skins just to make sure they are still there.

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But most of the time she watches the strangers, well-dressed strangers not from this neighborhood, who walk quickly from block to block, absorbed and entranced by their destinations, seeing nothing.

Her destination today was the supermarket, the welfare office. But she tells herself it's all right, the welfare, the food stamps, won't always be like this, things will change, get better, after all she has a college degree, a diploma, something magic, the first in her family. So she has to remember that. "But in history?" An employment counsellor had said, astonished, but a very familiar, routine astonishment. He had said, "Well, you know you can't do anything with that." And then he asked her what machines she could operate, was she familiar with any of the machines on this list?

But one of the employment counsellors was friendly, sympathetic. She was a little older than Angela, a white woman, pretty, but a woman who wore a little more make-up, a little more force in her smile than Angela. She studied her a minute and then said, "Your boyfriend made a bad husband and you got a couple kids, right? And you don't know what to do. Oh, honey, I know." She took her hand. "I know. And look at this, you graduated from college. But honey, I got a kid in here today with a master's degree in something you couldn't even pronounce, and I don't want to discourage you, but she was useless, good lord, didn't know anything you need to know to live, to keep alive."

And good grades. Angela always had good grades, and good grades must mean something. She was convinced of it. She must be able to do something. Her mother said she could come home, that's what she could do. She said Latent was working in a plant in Birmingham part-time, "but he still thinking about his ghosts, still waiting for Grandma's ghost to finish that book of his. Amanda Jane has a touch of the flu, been in bed all week, nothing serious, but wants to hear from you. Keeps asking if there's a letter from Angela Ann. Keep the Lord in your heart and come home. Love, Mama."

She tears up the letter. She didn't believe in ghosts, she didn't even believe in her fear of ghosts, only Aunt Amanda Jane believed in that. She would tell Angela's stiff little body, "Now don' you worry bout them ghosts Latent tell you bout, he ain't gonna conjure up no ghosts. Even if he could, oh, Lawdy, help us, they never hurt you honey, cause ghosts is the soul. Theys not the body that does, theys the soul that is. Ghosts like them, they might wanna

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scream up the grass in the winna, and oh, Lawdy, they in pain, yes, Lawd; but ghosts like them, chile, they jes can't do nuthin. They jes can't."

She throws the pieces of the letter into a wastebasket in her living room.

Her living room is a greenish-brown, with a little blue. A couple of worn blue tweed chairs and the wallpaper is light green with brown dancing women who have cried the whole way down one wall, the wall that faces the street, the rain and the snow. She asked the landlord about the leaks, said he was letting his own apartment depreciate, it wasn't her wallpaper after all. He had smiled, the kind of smile babies smile by accident, with a burp. He had said, "Yes." Just yes. So she let them cry, all those women who lost their limbs, their faces. Good, she thought that they should be mutilated by nature and not by men. But how did it happen? How did her husband break her nose? And how could she know when even Sidney Poitier on a chain gang, a convicted murderer, gave her such a gentle, loving look? Her mother agreed with Enrique's gentle soul; she had said, "You treat this man good, honey." Of course Angela had known Enrique had gotten into fights, knifed someone once. A long time ago. But his life with her would be different. Saved by their love. Protected. Yes, she admitted she was tired and needed protecting. But wasn't that her privilege, after all, as a woman? No, those were someone else's words. She, Angela Powers Jones, advocated equality. And in their marriage they both had had an equal chance to escape, to die gracefully.

Dear Amanda Jane, she writes from an old round kitchen table with a formica top. Writing Dear Amanda eternally, she believes, into her one hundredth year of life. One hundred sheets of her daughter's tablet paper crumpled up and stuffed under the exposed pipes of her kitchen sink, although later she would dig them out and count them and find that, really, there were only 15. Dear Amanda Jane, she writes, but a friend of hers from college, whom she hasn't seen since college, comes over and interrupts her with her good clothes, her good job, her advanced degrees; she takes her hand and says, "Oh, Angela." Her friend's face is disappointed, compassionate, going out of control. But Angela's face, her perfect smile, her perfect bone structure and perfect teeth are convincing, persuasive. She says, "It's not so bad, really. It's just the wallpaper. It's such an awful color." Later, her friend, brave in her expensive dress, her neatly sculptured afro, her solid gold hoop earrings, asks,

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"But a man like that, Angela? A man who would physically abuse you?"

Angela shrugs. She looks out the window at the buildings. Buildings like her building. Old and dirty with small cement yards. And she thinks that some place else in Philadelphia things must be growing, coming alive. She thinks of trees and grass and flowers, and she feels suddenly deserted, angry.

Her friend makes an effort to sit neatly in one of Angela's sagging chairs, not to get stuffing on her dress. She says, "Angela Powers. Our social conscience. That Angela Powers shrugs?" She makes another effort to laugh, to joke about this. Then enthusiastically she says, "Angela, remember that paper you read in sociology? About our people struggling to get up north where the cold air will revive them, but with the cotton still caught under their fingernails. Remember? And about their new life in the north, how ironically it wasn't new at all, but the same. The same rats and the same weariness to be white, so that they felt cheated, as if they had been purposefully distracted at that moment when things were going to change. Remember that? God, Angela, we couldn't believe it was you . . . you were always so quiet. And remember our professor, Miss Dover, a white conservative woman, a little sickly, and how we swore she turned even whiter, embalmed right there at her own familiar worn desk she had written a poem about. Do you remember that? A poem about a *desk!* But anyway, your paper and Miss Dover, god, I've remembered that all these years!" Angela says nothing and after a minute her friend leans out of her chair and reaches over and touches Angela's hand again. She says, "If you ever want to talk about it. . . ." Angela doesn't move, she thinks only how hot it is. As hot as Mississippi. And it's only April. Only spring and still expected to be pleasant, comfortable.

She gets up and opens the window, feeling a little dizzy, a little tired. But in her mind she sees that her sociology professor does turn a little whiter, paler, behind that solid mahogany desk. A little shocked on such a routinely drowsy late May afternoon. And Angela feels that this, this must be something.

Her friend says, "Angela . . .?" She says other things also, but Angela is only aware of the beat of that other black woman's voice, aware of the beat of the tires, the horns outside, a faster, more demanding beat that continually assaults and wears down the streets and eardrums of her neighborhood. And she wonders what the beat is like in Africa in 1978, the Africa she sees on the news,

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and whether the beat of a thousand guns and bodies being pounded into the ground will destroy their forests; their jungles. But secretly, she wonders how really this has anything to do with her.

Her friend says, "Angela, can I help you? Is there any way I can help?"

"You help them," a skinny, angry young college woman of the 1960's says in her mind, "You help them set up programs. You give them food. And yet they deceive you, they cheat you and your government. They take your money and watch your televisions, your dreams. Because their dreams aren't so visible, so concrete. Surely you know that. And your dreams are too expensive, too impossible for them. And they know this, they smell this like they smelled those sweet suffocating lilacs, that wet cotton and oily sweat that permanently opened, widened their nostrils."

Words rehearsed over and over in a life she can hardly remember so it is a surprise they are still there, still in perfect order. She looks out the window and the bricks in the building across the street make her feel dizzy and confused, the way she felt dizzy for two months before her freshman year in college, alarming her parents. What was she just thinking about? Suddenly she can't remember. But who was that vicious accusing college girl with all those white faces staring at her, and four black ones too, all staring blankly at her. And who was this woman now who stared out her window all day, rocking on a rocking chair. No, that at least, wasn't true, she didn't have a rocking chair. And she did do something, she did take care of her daughter, of course, and she does have a college degree. . . .

Her friend comes over to her, concerned with her silence, her appearance of nausea and sickness, concerned also with the dust that makes her cough, blown in from somewhere she can't see. But she manages to ask Angela if she is all right. Is she all right? Angela, her mind blank now, not dizzy anymore, assures her she is fine, fine in her strong thin, handsome black body, she is just tired. Saw her lover last night, not a violent man either, not very violent at all. And her daughter will be home from school soon. And the dishes have to be washed, and the roaches chased off the counters; her daughter is very fussy, squeamish; not good at all in the role of a poor minority child. Her friend says, "God, Angela, look at me. You can do better, girl. Girl, you can do so much better." Angela says of course, she plans on it. She smiles and says, "Don't worry about me, Rennie." She stares at her hands, so long and thin and

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graceful. "I think I'll become a doctor. Enrique hated doctors. Was scornful of them. Scornful of healing itself." She says, but today she is just so tired. Her friend nods, and they walk together to the door. Her friend hugs and kisses her good-bye. She says, "But you still look good Angela. Fantastic. Remember that. You still have a chance."

When her friend leaves, she falls asleep and dreams she is in a jungle in Africa and a tribal chief whom she knows is a murderer, insists she is his wife. She is attracted to him and thinks maybe this is true, but she somehow feels she is married to someone else, although she can't remember him, can't picture him at all. And then she thinks of her Aunt Amanda Jane and she can't remember if she is dead or alive, but surely if she were dead, surely she would remember the funeral? So she comes to the conclusion in the dream that she must have amnesia. And in her amnesia married the tribal chief. A handsome man who treats her gently. So why should she strain to remember a life she's already forgotten? And she can't think of a reason why. And yet she feels uncomfortable. And is glad to wake up.

Since it is 1:00 in the afternoon she fixes herself a light lunch. Some lettuce and tuna fish. She thinks about her dream and laughs because the tribal chief looked like Sidney Poitier, although she is a little ashamed to have dreamed herself so easily married to a murderer.

Sitting in a light cotton dress at her kitchen table, having finished eating now, and absent-mindedly peeling the formica off the top of the table. White and black formica, although the white has yellowed a little. Has given up writing to an old inert woman furiously trying to rock away her life on a porch in Mississippi that won't quite collapse and give up like that fence across the street; and not even Angela, Angela's elevation and rise into the mystical white forests of the north could save her. And of course Angela's marriage didn't work out, couldn't save anyone.

She cuts her thumb peeling the formica, but stubbornly she keeps peeling it, breaking it off in her fingers. And yes, it's true, she is ashamed of her aunt, an old ignorant woman who won't move and won't listen and won't die. Yes, so ashamed of her aunt, that she can't even write to her when she is sick in bed, a ninety-five-year-old woman of her own blood sick in bed, waiting to hear from her and she can't even tolerate her name, Amanda Jane, and yet she named her own daughter Amanda. Ashamed of her shame.

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At 2:00 she gets up and goes over to the window and looks out, vaguely daydreaming, vaguely watching for her daughter to come home from school. She has been waiting, watching at this window for such a long time, so many months, and nothing has happened. A "dangerous, high risk" neighborhood where, after all, there is no danger, no risk. A disappointment. Disappointing that the women on this wall cry, suffer, for only bad weather, too much spring rain. So she is surprised when there is an accident outside in front of her building, and her heart is pounding. A man hit by a car! A black man in a gold suit, hit and thrown to the sidewalk. Two men run away, quickly, deftly, and other people gather, press against each other, greedy for a better view. Kids run over and circle the area, kicking aimlessly at the garbage and then pushing and jostling each other to see the man.

Angela watches this from her window. She watches the people move slowly closer to that man lying on the ground not quite twisted out of shape, out of their reach. And she thinks of insects. Insects around a light. Swarms. Swarming. But the movement, the whispers, are choked off suddenly by sirens, police cars, an ambulance. And then someone yells. A thick, heavy voice, heavy with rage, pain, yelling, "He's dead so get the fuck out of here."

But they come anyway, the police, the ambulance. Two men bring out a stretcher. They cover the man on the ground with a white sheet. And Angela dreams of ghosts rising from the sidewalk, of white socks on black legs. And she wonders where this dream comes from and where it goes from here, wonders if she is going crazy finally, when there has never been any sign of it, no hint at all. They put the stretcher in the ambulance. They close the doors and drive away. She is shaking. Violently cold on such a warm spring day. Ashamed. Guilty. Almost sick. But she can't quite cry. She can't quite cry with the hundred other women in this apartment. A hundred brown women crying. And one who isn't. But after all she didn't even know him. "I didn't even know him," she says to no one of them in particular.

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STEVEN HELMLING

At the Museum, and After

Have the gods changed their natures?
  Inquire in the galleries: here is Kwannon
rendered buddhaform in brass on wood,
  holding a beaten copper lotus; here
a still stone yakshi dances, heedless
  that her face is smashed, her shoulder
shattered, and both breasts
  sheered off; here
a marble head of Aphrodite sits on steel,
  the body of her image gone:
only the quiet whited face remains
  from which to infer
the contrapposto and complexion of her moods,
  surviving centuries. So much
for our little hour of rhyming lust with dust.

The Snake

The elegant leathers he was dressed in
Sheathed hollowly a dark intestine

Hungry with an appetite
That whispered in the ear of night

Until the innocent blank skull
Of its own emptiness was full.

At length, and dimly, he proposes
An ashy and a fruitful gnosis;

What more could he insinuate?
They took, they tasted, and they ate.

Now at Eden's gate they stand;

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She laughs; he arcs a rainbow hand,

Saying, The world is all before us,
And behind us, Ouroboros.

With the Lights On

The tensor light is bent to the wall
And her bright head bends to my hips,

Revelation as the covers fall:
Creation writhes between her lips;

Window, mirror, picture, and all
The worlds they frame are in eclipse

As coupled beast and horseman crawl
By lamplight to Apocalypse.

Two Weeks After an April Frost

April's blossoms launch
Their smells at me
From every branch
Of every flowering tree;
There's a green
Deepening in the lawn
For the white magnolia petals to fall on—
But they blew too soon
To fall off white this year:
Bloomed white before any shoot of green,
Bloomed white where only grey black
Branches could be seen—
And then we had an April frost down here.
Only for an afternoon they lasted—
Came the freeze that night,

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And they were blasted.
The pink white petals all turned brown,
And warming breezes
Haven't blown them down.
The magnolia's leaves have sprung,
But the rust brown flowers cling,
As if spring and fall
Were hung on the same small tree.
No winter's breath was ever so unkind,
Not when Orpheus turned and looked behind—
Our young spring snapped
Like a young green sapling bough;
Kore's become Persephone somehow;
The matron will not be a maiden, now.

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WILLIAM PLUMMER

Three Versions of Faulkner

When Joseph Blotner's long-awaited life of Faulkner came out a few years ago, it was gratefully received by many reviewers as an "old-fashioned biography." (In Sgt. Joe Friday's definition of the genre: Just the facts, ma'am.) No doubt heaped by the tribe of Leon Edel, the reviewers hoped for and got another Carlos Baker—they welcomed Blotner's restraint and praised his decision to reject "analysis" and "interpretation." Yet examination reveals the not really surprising truth that Blotner *did* do his share of analyzing and interpreting, and that he even had his speculative moments.

He showed remarkable singlemindedness, for instance, in gathering, sorting, and interpreting the contradictory data on Faulkner's WWI experience with the RAF in Canada. The young Faulkner had portrayed himself to family and friends as a skilled flier capable of negotiating chandelles, Immelmans, loops. His brother John recalled that Faulkner returned from the war with a limp, the consequence, he allowed, of flying—lubricated by a crock of bourbon in the cockpit—his Sopwith Camel upside down into a hangar. Yet, assaying facts and probabilities with notable diligence for a dozen pages, Blotner is brought to conclude "that Cadet Faulkner did not crash." What is more, Blotner ventures to ask: "Did he ever fly?" The jury is still out on that one, but Blotner is inclined to believe, and at lengths to demonstrate, that Faulkner probably kept his feet on the ground. Blotner even offers speculation on his subject's penchant for role-playing.

My point is that Blotner is selectively attentive in the new-fangled manner, and that his life of Faulkner is "old-fashioned" in a different, and under the circumstances, regrettable way. That is, he steers clear of Faulkner's sexuality, which, a case can be made, may well be the *causa causans* of the great fiction. (One need only consider the spiral of sexual outrage in Faulkner's novels, the way the ante is raised with each new book from 1925 to 1936—from the initial sleazy interaction between that avatar of goatlike lust, Januarius Jones, and the epicene Cecily Saunders of *Soldiers' Pay* to the

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intimation of incest in *Flags in the Dust* and *The Sound and the Fury,* to the corncob rape in *Sanctuary,* the pulp horror of miscegenation in *Light in August,* and finally the twin terrors of miscegenation and incest compounded in *Absalom, Absalom!*)

Blotner's biography, however, seems almost racy when compared to his *Selected Letters of William Faulkner.*[1] At least in the biography there was the suggestion that Faulkner was endowed with the usual male equipment. Actually, Blotner himself appears not to be comfortable with this new bowdlerized selection:

> There are omissions in these letters which are indicated by ellipses. (Faulkner himself used this device sparingly, and it will be clear to the reader at which points the ellipses appeared in the original.). . . Among the letters printed here some intimate passages have been omitted. Many of these, however, are treated in *Faulkner: A Biography,* where there was space to set them forth in relation to the situations which elicited them. Some of these omissions are of the sort to be found in the published letters of James Joyce—material much less intense and sparser in quantity, however, than in the case of the great Irish writer. In any event, one hopes that the reader will not begrudge the artist this shred of privacy at this stage in the history of the Faulkner corpus. One day, very possibly, he may stand as utterly revealed as do some other twentieth-century writers, but that day seems far off. One reason is that the editor and biographer must take what he can get. Some who knew William Faulkner refused to supply any information. Others who were willing to help sometimes supplied only excerpts rather than complete letters from him. This was their privilege, and one can only be grateful to them for providing as they did glimpses into William Faulkner's mind and life as they related to his art. I hope that the reader who admires the work and respects the man will concur.

It is difficult to fault Blotner for these letters (most of the letters to women, especially those to Faulkner's wife, Estelle, have been cut severely); as he says, in apparently retrospective apology for the biography as well, "the editor and biographer must take what he can get." Besides, the spectacle of his tact—his effort at once to reprove lightly and thank his sources, to apologize to his reader and gently rebuke him for his curiosity about Faulkner's sex life, to take credit and deny blame for the selection itself—is rather touching. The reader should know, however, that documentary information on Faulkner's sexuality is available (in overkill) in Meta Carpenter

[1] SELECTED LETTERS OF WILLIAM FAULKNER, edited by *Joseph Blotner.* Random House. $15.00.

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Wilde's *Loving Gentleman*[2] and in, of all places, Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*.[3]

In spite of its limitations, the *Selected Letters* is interesting, even edifying. It begins in 1918 with a squib from the RAF cadet in Toronto, then moves on to his dealings with The Four Seas Company, a small press that was sharing the cost with Faulkner for his first book, *The Marble Faun,* a book of poems. Next thing we know, it is 1925 and Faulkner is traveling in Europe with his friend William Spratling, a young artist; he has already by this time met Sherwood Anderson and written *Soldiers' Pay,* which Anderson—the legend goes—was to recommend to Boni and Liveright provided he did not have to read it.

In Europe Faulkner teams up with the Pounds and Eliots against the Henrietta Stackpoles: "The cathedral of Notre Dame is grand," but Milano "Full of Americans—terrible"; "I found Stresa full of American tourists, so I took my pack and typewriter and lit out for the mountains above Lake Maggiore." The letters from Europe charm by their exuberance: he writes from Paris, "I was talking to a painter, a real one." (This kind of thinking must have dashed Spratling a little.) He mingles with characters fresh from the pages of Margaret Anderson's *Little Review,* Futurists and Vorticists, real ones. He writes "2000 words about the Luxembourg gardens and death," which will later turn up at the end of *Sanctuary*. He writes "Moms" that he is making progress on his never-to-be-published *Elmer* and that his poetry is becoming *Symboliste* with a vengeance: "I have over 20,000 words on my novel, and I have written a poem so modern that I dont know myself what it means."

Most interesting of all, for my money, is the glimpse the letters offer of Faulkner's metamorphosis into the retiring, literate countryman who speaks with such disarming, almost cloying self-effacement in the published interviews, *Faulkner in the University, Faulkner at Nagano* (Japan), etc. A little background is necessary, however, to make out the import of the letters collected here. It is useful, and perhaps somewhat surprising, to know that Faulkner as a kid was closer in temperament to Tom Sawyer than to Huck Finn, that he was precocious, entranced by the baubles of the day. He was the leader of the neighborhood gang: he invented their games (such as

[2] A LOVING GENTLEMAN: THE LOVE STORY OF WILLIAM FAULKNER AND META CARPENTER, by *Meta Carpenter Wilde* and *Orin Borsten*. Simon and Schuster. $9.95.
[3] WILLIAM FAULKNER: TOWARD YOKNAPATAWPHA AND BEYOND, by *Cleanth Brooks*. Yale University Press. $17.50.

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"horseball," a kind of baseball that involved horses and zapping the rider with acorns); he built an airplane that shattered mid-flight when his pals and the local Negroes tossed him off a bluff; he also built a steam engine that burned down the kids' playhouse. Faulkner used *American Boy* magazine as a source book of how-to adventure much as Tom Sawyer used his penny-dreadful "authorities" on pirating. Indeed, Faulkner seems to have taken a leaf almost literally out of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. According to John Faulkner, in his memoir *My Brother Bill,* Mrs. Faulkner noticed that a neighborhood tough, Fritz McElroy, was coming home every evening with young Bill and was doing her son's chore of bringing coal into the house. She watched them and noted that Faulkner would walk beside Fritz and talk to him but would never touch the coal itself. "Finally she found that Bill was telling Fritz continued stories, breaking off each day at the point where Fritz would be sure to come back next day to find out what happened." William Faulkner, out of Scheherazade by Tom Sawyer.

Faulkner's Tom-Sawyering apparently took a turn away from mischief toward "style," Tom's other great concern, with the introduction of two new elements during his teenage years: Moms determined that her first-born was becoming stoop-shouldered and fitted him with braces; and Faulkner discovered the petite and dainty, older and more "mature" Estelle Oldham. He became more civilized. Says brother John, "It was about this time that Bill began to develop an almost foppish taste in clothes." Faulkner's need for glamour remained undiminished, but it moved in a different key. When Estelle married someone else, he went off to the RAF in Canada; when the war closed down before he could get into it, he came home and paraded through town in his uniform, complete with Sam Browne belt and overseas cap. He took some courses at the University, contributed decadent-ish verse to the school paper, did Beardsleyesque (by way of John Held Jr.) pen and inks for the yearbook, and moseyed around campus with studied world-weariness, to the irritation of his peers who dubbed him the "Count."

In 1925, he was off to New Orleans, where a Southern cultural upheaval—led by the *Double Dealer,* a landmark little magazine—was in the making. To the *Double Dealer,* he contributed verse and prose sketches imitative of Sherwood Anderson, Joyce, and Conrad. He also wrote *Soldiers' Pay,* a prototypical WWI novel that coupled the hijinks of Cummings' *Enormous Room* with the miasma

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of Eliot's *Waste Land*. While *Soldiers' Pay* was most surely, as critic Michael Millgate has remarked, Faulkner's calculated effort to enter the sophisticated ranks of *Waste Land* authors, his next novel, written partly on the 1925 boat trip to Europe, was a comparable gesture to a different set of literati. *Mosquitoes* is an attempt at a Huxleyan "conversation novel," that is, it is a book of endless, would-be witty, leaden talk among static characters—talk on Topics, such as Art, Life, Sex. (One contemporary reviewer said *Mosquitoes* called to mind a "high school graduating class putting on an English comedy of manners.")

This is where *Selected Letters* picks up the skein. By 1927 Faulkner had given up poetry and had taken Anderson's famous advice and written about his own patch of native soil, Yoknapatawpha County. The book was *Flags in the Dust (Sartoris)*, and his enthusiasm for it ran high; he wrote Horace Liveright, "At last and certainly, as El Orens' sheik said, I have written THE book, of which those other things were but foals." Liveright was not convinced and nixed the manuscript, making Faulkner hard put to pay back drafts made against the manuscript's success. He wrote Liveright:

> I mean to pay you the money as soon as I place the rejected mss. I know a New Yorker cannot conceive of anyone being able to live day in and day out, yet without having as much as a hundred dollars or ten dollars, but it is not only possible in the provincial South; damn near 90% of the population does it. If I can place this mss., I will be able to pay you; at least I'll have incentive to light in and bang you out a book to suit you—though it'll never be one as youngly glamorous as "Soldiers' Pay" nor as trashily smart as "Mosquitoes."

These few sentences are of special interest because they put in view the final phase of the Faulkner persona. From the savvy rakish war hero, the enervated "Count," and the smart-ass New Orleans sophisticate, he is evolving into the countryman whose downhome ways have little truck with those of slick city types. (A few years later, Faulkner would accept an invitation to a Southern authors conference at the University of Virginia but would warn his hosts of his social limitations with this homely analogy, his new stock-in-trade: "You have seen a country wagon come into town, with a hound dog under the wagon. It stops on the Square and the folks get out, but that hound never gets very far from the wagon. He might be cajoled or scared out for a short distance, but first thing

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you know he has scuttled back under the wagon; maybe he growls at you a little. Well, that's me.")

Yet a seemingly contradictory dynamic is, as well, set in motion. *Soldiers' Pay* was a young man's book, *Mosquitoes* was "trashily smart," *Flags in the Dust* was at last the real thing—but the publishing kind cannot bear very much reality. He would not "bang out a book to suit" the likes of Liveright but, rather, starts work on a novel which, he writes his Aunt Bama, is "the damndest book I ever read. I dont believe anyone will publish it for 10 years." The book is *The Sound and the Fury* and the new ethic Faulkner is embracing is that of failure—although not without self-pity; in early 1929 he writes Alfred Harcourt, who took *Flags (Sartoris)* but had just rejected *The Sound and the Fury*: "That is all right. I did not believe that anyone would publish it. . . . Spring has come here—a false one, of course; just enough to catch the fruit trees and flowers with their pants down about next month. It's nice while it lasts, though." It is appropriate that during this period, queried by the *Chicago Tribune,* Faulkner says the one book he would most like to have written is *Moby Dick,* for Melville too found solace in and created tortuous works out of a creed of failure formulated when his reputation and spirit were at their lowest. It is at about this time, too, that Faulkner starts to rank his peers according to a now famous, inverted logic: Thomas Wolfe was the best writer of his day because his was the greatest failure; Hemingway was the least of the best because he had a tidy talent that was doing all right, thank you.

The new ethic was sorely tested in 1931 with the publication of *Sanctuary,* when it looked as though Faulkner might well be the Erica Jong of his era. He wrote Estelle—who by this time had divorced Cornell Franklin and married her childhood sweetheart—from Tudor City, Manhattan.

> I am writing a movie for Talullah Bankhead. How's that for a high? . . . I have created quite a sensation. I have had luncheons in my honor by magazine editors every day for a week now, besides evening parties, or people who want to see what I look like. In fact, I have learned with astonishment that I am now the most important figure in American letters. That is, I have the best future. Even Sinclair Lewis and Dreiser make engagements to see me, and Mencken is coming all the way up from Baltimore to see me on Wednesday.

With his obscure Southern author suddenly a hot property, Harri-

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son Smith, Faulkner's publisher, began to worry. He saw Harold Guinzburg waxing chummy and Bennett Cerf taking Faulkner's measure for Modern Library and bigger things, so, in a perfectly wonderful episode, he assigned two underlings to see his investment out of harm's way. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, however, had their own fish to fry. They wisked the boozy Faulkner from the clutches of the competition and, in the process, milked their sodden charge for a handful of newly valuable unpublished poems and stories for their own little magazine, *Contempo*. Smith was irate; Faulkner contrite. He wrote his agent, Ben Wasson: "I don't know if it is as serious as Hal [Smith] says. But anyway, my country innocence has been taken advantage of." This is said in all seriousness—it is a refrain, a virtual tic of (unapologetic) apology, that is heard again and again in the *Selected Letters* as Faulkner settles into his role as the countryman who, incidentally, writes novels.

From the mid-1930's through the 1940's the letters take on a new concern and become, sadly, rather tedious going. The popular success of *Sanctuary* brought Faulkner needed funds, true, but the income, which was short term, created needs that were ongoing. The letters of this period—a substantial portion of the contents of *Selected Letters*—are about Faulkner's appalling finances. In 1934, hitting Hal Smith for a draft of $500, he describes his straits:

> As I explained to you before, I have my own taxes and my mother's, and the possibility that Estelle's people will call on me before February 1, and also my mother's and Dean's [a brother] support, and occasional demands from my other two brothers which I can never anticipate. Then in March I have $700.00 insurance and income tax of $1500.00. So I seem right now to rush from pillar to post and return.

Faulkner's list of dependents pales beside that of, say, Muhammad Ali but, then, he is getting only $300–1000 for being on the card at *Harper's* or *Scribner's* or the *Saturday Evening Post*.

During this period his literary motives strike a new low. He writes a "pulp series" (*The Unvanquished*) specifically for the *Post*'s relatively lucrative market; he hopes that Smith can "gouge" one magazine or another for inferior short fiction; he writes that he is "trying to bugger up an air story for Cosmopolitan," which he also calls "the Kotex Age." In April 1935 he says, "I am writing two stories a week now. I dont know how long I can keep it up." Meanwhile, he is trying to sell the manuscripts for *The Sound and The Fury, As I Lay Dying, Sanctuary,* and *Light in August*; meanwhile,

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he is trying to write *Requiem for a Nun,* his Snopes books, and *Absalom, Absalom!* Hollywood and his work there as a script doctor offer him some financial relief—as well as sexual and spiritual fulfillment, if Meta Carpenter Wilde is to be believed, a matter I will pursue in a moment—but Faulkner does not achieve real security until the summer of 1948, when he sells *Intruder in the Dust* to the movies for $50,000.

It is interesting, however, that he senses early on that his talent is spent and that for some time he has been pretty much forging his own signature. In 1940, when his financial circumstances are actually better than in the mid-30's, he makes his first turn on the Melvillean formulation "Dollars damn me": "But maybe a man worrying about money cant write anything worth buying," he says, apparently forgetting that he wrote *Absalom, Absalom!* in the midst of pauperdom. In May 1940, in a letter to his publisher, Robert K. Haas, he blames the times for his inability to write; in 1944 he writes his agent, Harold Ober, "War is bad for writing . . . I have a considerable talent, perhaps as good as any coeval. But I am 46 now. So what I will mean soon by 'have' is 'had.' "

It is all over for Faulkner the writer in 1940. He will still "write," *edit* really, *Go Down Moses,* the Snopes trilogy, the *Collected Stories*—the best parts of which were written in the 20's and 30's—and he will, less fortunately, write *A Fable* and *The Reivers.* He will, as well, be discovered by Malcolm Cowley, win the Nobel, and get himself in trouble with the public on such topics as Negroes and The American Dream. The *Selected Letters* is more than half taken up with the dead wood of Faulkner's later years, a little of which goes a long way.

Meta Carpenter (the name by which Faulkner knew her during the Hollyood years) begins her often fascinating cartoon of a memoir with a question, "Why this book?" No mere rhetorical question, given the store William Faulkner, her lover and ostensible subject, set on privacy. "In these years since his death, I had never thought of writing about this gifted man whose life was so tightly laced with mine," she says. "Now it appears that I must do whatever I can while I'm alive to protect the truth and beauty of our relationship. . . ." Meta Carpenter had it through the grapevine that a number of film-studio hacks were patiently waiting for her to check out so they might cash in on the lurid tale of the Celebrated Author and the Hollywood Script Girl. To protect truth and beauty Ms.

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Carpenter was forced to commit *A Loving Gentleman* to paper: after all, "One cannot prevent distortions of the truth from the grave." Furthermore, she had hopes of rehabilitating Faulkner's public image: "I can only hope that the image in these pages of William Faulkner in love, spirited and happy and fulfilled part of the time at least, will correct the prevalent notion that he was a chill, arrogant man."

Faulkner would have quickly seen through his paramour's motive-mongering. He was notoriously disabused about rationales for setting the record straight. Quizzed at the University of Virginia on Quentin Compson's investment in revealing the truth about Thomas Sutpen, he said: "every time any character gets into a book, no matter how minor, he's actually telling his biography—that's all anyone ever does, he tells his own biography, talking about himself, in a thousand different terms, but himself." Plainly and simply, *A Loving Gentleman* is Meta Carpenter's effort, in her early sixties, to make her life appear to have been interesting.

The narrative, which begins in the mid 1930's and ends in the 1960's shortly after Faulkner's death, is marked by nonstop name-dropping—most of the glamorous monikers conscripted under the flimsiest pretexts. Maurice Chevalier's "dazzling Gallic presence" is introduced briefly because he once made eyes at Meta; Bette Davis is afforded a cameo because, improbably enough, the author learns that she, an obscure script girl, is "a romantic figure" to the "great emotional actress." When Mary Astor's affair with George S. Kaufman splashes across the trades, Meta stops to reflect on a delicious fate-worse-than-death: "What would scandal do to me if my own relationship with William Faulkner came to light—Jimmie Fidler moralizing about it on his radio show, Louella O. Parsons alluding to it in her syndicated column. I would not—of that I was certain—have the resilience of Mary Astor." In perhaps her most daring puff, she follows a swat at the artistry of her boss, Howard Hawks, ("The deification of Howard Hawks by movie cultists decades later caught me by surprise"), with the suggestion that the Jean Arthur character in his films—"straight-shooting, accommodating, undemanding, sweetheart and pal all in one"—was based on her relationship with Faulkner, which Hawks, sly fox, had apparently been monitoring more closely than she thought.

Not only was/is Meta *interesting,* she was virtuous (read "hard-to-get"). The first quarter of the book details Faulkner's laborious assault on and the gradual surrender of her citadel. The induce-

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ments for instant capitulation were myriad: Faulkner's celebrity, the Southern heritage they shared, the dearth of eligible non-homosexual males in Hollywood. But Meta Carpenter held out until her Richardsonian economics were satisfied: until she was convinced that marriage was in the offing and, most importantly, that Faulkner not only lusted for but worshipped her ("my body to him like bread"); she soon tilted the ledger in her favor by obtaining a second admirer of nearly comparable credentials and keeping him in a holding pattern waiting for her first choice to put up or depart. Though Meta sticks to her guns with the tenacity of Pamela, she has dreams that Jane Eyre might have blanched at: "Sleep overtook me and I dreamed of William Faulkner in an airman's helmet flying low in a warplane over a foreign land, and of great caves open to the sea and the howling wind, and of my own hands . . . moving thunderously over a piano keyboard."

In spite of all, *A Loving Gentleman* manages to exhibit a side of Faulkner never before put on view. Somehow, through the screen of puffery and smarm, Faulkner is seen in the round as a sexual being. Given Ms. Carpenter's venom towards Estelle Faulkner, she is probably not altogether reliable when detailing her lover's sexual incompatibility with his wife. But there is no way, with her meager resources, that she could contrive Faulkner's erotic poetry. Shortly after their first time together, and upon noticing that Meta was reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* Faulkner's Mr. Bowen (cf. Lawrence's John Thomas) wrote Meta's Mrs. Bowen (Lady Jane) these lines:

> To Mrs. Bowen. Sweet, the maiden's mouth is (not) cold,
> (by a damn sight)
> Her breast blossoms are simply red; (I know why they're red)
> Her hair, mere brown or gold (one where, even less brown
> than gold
> Since no sun kisses there, but only one of earth's sons
> seeks delight
> When lover's dark limbs cover the beloved's white)
> Fold on fold (she holds and he is holed). . .

This naughty verse in knotty Shakespearean or seventeenth century style—the memoir itself might have been titled "Meta-Physical Poet"—initiates a whole correspondence from Mr. to Mrs. Bowen. We hear more from Mr. Bowen, perhaps, than some would wish (the subject of one letter is nocturnal emissions), but the fully

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fleshed depiction of Faulkner as an often witty, highly passionate, at times jealous, generally sensitive lover is a welcome supplement to the android Blotner perforce sketches in.

Although he is repeatedly "seized by a consuming sexual energy" (Says Meta: "I did not need him in the wild, insatiable way he needed me"), Faulkner is at the same time a loving gentleman of a different and contradictory stripe. He is Faulkner the "schoolboy," in Yeats's phrase, "his nose pressed against the sweet-shop window" of idealized sensuality—a rarefied being, his emotional development seemingly arrested in adolescence. Speaking of her inability to judge properly *this* Faulkner upon first meeting him, Meta Carpenter says: "What did I . . . know of men who read Swinburne and Keats and secretly dream of 'the one fair woman?' " The business of "the one fair woman" sounds like a prelude to more of Meta's self-advertisements, but certain striking images justify the trope. One third of the way into the book, Faulkner and his lover escape Hollywood for their first weekend in a bungalow by the sea, where they make love before open casements:

> That night when I came to Bill in my new nightgown, he had covered the bed with gardenia and jasmine petals. Where he had found the flowers, where he had concealed them until that moment of surprise, I was too stunned to ask. He stood, shyly waiting for my approval . . . I could only look from the blossom-strewn bed to the unabashed romantic who had emerged from the many selves of William Faulkner.

"Unabashed romantic," to be sure: When he and Meta part at one point he keeps her napkin blotted with lipstick and returns it, partly decomposed, years later. Another time he presents his lover with a box containing a ribbon for her hair. This gives Meta pause: "Although I thanked him and wore it, I was troubled by his choice of gift":

> Although he made love to me as a man to a woman, there were times he saw me as far younger than I was. A girl-child. With one flourish of his mental blue pencil, he would edit out all the facts of my life since Memphis—my birthdays, my marriage, my work—and behave toward me as if I were just out of high school. I don't remember making an effort to play my assigned part at these times, for, if anything, I was confounded by his need to turn me into a sweet, tremulous girl.

It is edifying to compare the image from *Soldiers' Pay* of the paradoxical Januarius Jones—half lecher, half visionary—clutching in his arms the degraded, boyish Cecily Saunders, trying to transmute

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her by force of will into an idealized concretion of the female principle itself:

> He refused to hear her breath as he refused to feel a bodily substance in his arms. Not an ivory carving: this would have body, rigidity; not an animal that eats and digests—this is the heart's desire purged of flesh. "Be Quiet," he told himself as much as her, "don't spoil it."

Then, too, it is useful to compare the obsessive, unmanning devotion of Horace Benbow, Quentin Compson, and Jody Varner to a vision from childhood of each of their sisters as "the one fair woman"; or to consider the flip side of this obsession treated comically in the portrayal of Gavin Stevens, who is aroused exclusively by female children on the verge of puberty—as soon as one desired object crosses the threshold to adulthood, his attention shifts, quite literally, to the next, still unsullied child in line.

The message of *A Loving Gentleman* to the reader interested in *biographemes,* in the energies and deflections of the performance of great artists, is that Faulkner's "literary emotions" were quite probably his own personal ones. While this may not be news—certain critics, notably Leslie Fiedler and Albert Guerard, have taken this conjunction for granted—it is the first bit of documentary evidence I know of. Meta Carpenter's book, almost in spite of itself, should figure one day in a study that, in Blotner's language, will reveal Faulkner "as utterly" as Joyce and other important twentieth century writers.

Cleanth Brooks's *William Faulkner: Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*[3] is a curious, often engaging, excessive book, which could only have been published by a university press, where traditionally Occam's Razor is seldom wielded. There is a legitimate book buried in it of about 150 pages, which treats Faulkner's apprenticeship, but the bulk of the volume is given over to random essays, to appendices and notes, to obiter dicta. *Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond* is meant to be a companion to Brooks's well known study of fifteen years ago, but it is, like Alfred Appel's work on Nabokov, really less an instance of criticism, or even of hagiography, than of symbiosis. For over a decade the several Southern journals for which Faulkner is virtually a cottage industry have been showcasing the relationship, effectively a "Faulkner-Brooks File."

Collected here, in addition to the six pieces on the apprentice work, are essays on *Pylon, The Wild Palms,* and *A Fable,* novels which

[3] WILLIAM FAULKNER: TOWARD YOKNAPATAWPHA AND BEYOND, by *Cleanth Brooks.* Yale University Press. $17.50.

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were not treated in Brooks's *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (1963) because they are set outside Faulkner's imaginary county; and essays on Faulkner's notions of time and history, on the narrative structure of *Absalom, Absalom!,* on Thomas Sutpen as a representative southern planter, and on the parallels between Faulkner and Yeats. These essays harbor few surprises; indeed, they pale beside the main source of the book's fascination—the nearly 100 pages of "Notes," which beg to be read as a work apart.

Some of the notes are standard scholarly fare, much of which has already been served up elsewhere by others. Brooks shows that Faulkner effectively "translated" Verlaine in several early poems and that Cabell's *Jurgen* was crucial to Faulkner's aborted novel *Mayday*; he sorts out the differences between *Flags in the Dust* and its published version, *Sartoris*; he traces Faulkner's "attitudes toward fighter pilots and aerial acrobats" and makes distinctions in his feelings about the Civil War and WWI; he discusses the overall impact of Joyce, the allusions to Hemingway in *The Wild Palms,* and the possible derivation of Freudian ideas through the intelligentsia of the New Orleans Vieux Carré in the mid 20's. This is fairly straightforward, useful stuff.

Brooks, however, suffers an awesome compulsion to make lists. He provides a marvelous ten-page chart of "Literary Borrowings and Echoes in Faulkner," an eccentric treat that juxtaposes passages from Faulkner with counterparts in Kipling, Tennyson, Amy Lowell, Swinburne, Cummings, Whitman, Marlowe, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Horace, Rostand, Conrad, Poe, you-name-him. In another list he numbers the characters in *Mosquitoes* and aligns them, with commentary, with their alleged real life prototypes. In probably his most excessive pastime, he presents a meticulous "Chronology" for each of the books studied, and ballasts each with the most unpersuasive apologia. He raises the pertinent question himself in his preface to the *Pylon* chronology: "Since Faulkner was writing fiction and not history, one may ask whether it makes any difference whether the year was 1934 or 1935, or 1929, for that matter?" One may ask, indeed. The answer forthcoming is, however, that the "note" is for the Mardi Gras cognoscenti who may be perplexed, without Brooks's assistance, by Faulkner's playing fast and loose with the traditional time scheme of the revel. Hmm.

More winning are the notes in which Brooks gives his hobby its recondite head—when he argues for the improbable influence of one Irvin S. Cobb, a lackluster short story writer of the 20's who,

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Brooks thinks, may have lighted Faulkner's way to Yoknapatawpha; or when he tracks down the cancelled title of *The Wild Palms,* "If I Forget Thee Jerusalem," and locates it in the 20's bestseller *Messer Marco Polo.* Most delicious of all is Brooks's note, "The Story of the Chops and the Iron Dog," which addresses the incident in *The Wild Palms* when Harry and Charlotte in an elaborately desperate joke place their last bit of food, two chops, as a kind of offering before a statue of a Saint Bernard planted in someone's lawn in Evanston, Illinois. Says Brooks: "I think I have seen the dog in question. . . . It is a lifesized cast-iron Saint Bernard that lives in a front yard of a residence in the uptown section of New Orleans. . . . The owner of this stately, iron-hearted beast has told me that years ago several other copies were cast in New Orleans. I wonder whether Faulkner may not have seen one of them."

The essays lack the personal touch and energy of the "Notes." Actually, the ones on topics and on the novels not covered by Brooks's earlier study are somewhat perfunctory; one gets the feeling that Brooks may be less interested in *Pylon, The Wild Palms,* and *A Fable* as peculiar entities than he is in covering the Faulkner waterfront. The essays on the apprentice work, especially "Faulkner's Poetry" and "Early Romantic Prose," are fresh, rich with booty lifted from the special collections at the Universities of Virginia and Tulane. What is more, they testify engagingly to the niceness of Brooks's ear. To give just one example, cued by Faulkner's mention of Swinburne in his essay "Verse Old and Nascent" (the *Double Dealer,* April 1925), Brooks locates in the early poetry four different echoes of a line from *Atalanta in Calydon* (one of which, amusingly, takes Swinburne's image of a nymph's "bright breast shortening into sighs" and converts it into "no shortening-breasted nymph," a decided cuisinary howler). The pleasure in reading Brooks here is in discovering phrasal formulations in Faulkner's own and others' work that are fetish objects, amulets for the young writer—"erotic sites," Roland Barthes would call them—which glisten with import that is not quite articulate.

Brooks is good on Faulkner's A. E. Housman connection, on demonstrating that poem after poem in *A Green Bough* is deeply indebted to *A Shropshire Lad.* He is good, too, on Faulkner's debt to Eliot (he argues convincingly that Faulkner must have seen *Prufrock and Other Observations* before it was published in this country). He rightly observes that the admired writer of Faulkner's apprenticeship established "a gravitational field" so powerful that it captured

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any errant piece of writing and transformed it into either imitation or parody; Faulkner before, say, *Flags in the Dust* (1927) did not use but was used by his influences.

Having made this observation, however, Brooks backs off from its interesting implications. He notes that in the essay "Verse Old and Nascent"—which is specifically about influences—Faulkner refers to Robinson, Aldington, Frost and Aiken (who were not overtly influential) and acknowledges his debt to *A Shropshire Lad* but, significantly, neglects to cite Eliot. "As is plain," Brooks observes, "the failure to mention Eliot denies what is an obviously important aspect of Faulkner's development." He further observes that Eliot's influence is "strong" and can be discerned in Faulkner "until at least as late as *Pylon* (1935)." Yet unlike his colleague at Yale, Harold Bloom, Brooks is not much interested in the Family Romance and the goings-on between Strong Poets. What piques his interest is not, finally, Faulkner's failure to mention Eliot or his complementary, repeated denial years later of having read *Ulysses* prior to writing *The Sound and The Fury*. Brooks prefers to soften his focus—that is, to generalize the lineaments of a specific literary relation into a rather shopworn critical binarism. Housman and Eliot, he suggests, are standard-bearers in opposition: "Housman is one of the last of the romantics and Eliot one of the first of the moderns," and thereby represent roads to be taken. By Brooks's lights, Faulkner needed to disavow Housman's fuzzy romantic qualities and seize his wit, irony, and *realism* (an honorific)—which accorded with similar modernist virtues in Eliot. When Faulkner went his Yoknapatawpha route he took the way Eliot and other modernist realists traveled by and that made all the difference. So much for the agitation, much less the anxiety, of influence; so much for the burden of the past.

Brooks seems to have a stake in Faulkner's normalcy—or so his vigilance, his quickness to argue with assorted undesignated adversaries would suggest. He inveighs against readers who see "A Rose For Emily" as "a horrifying tale of necrophilia"; he says that "none but the most determinedly psychoanalytical . . . will insist upon reading the relationship between Pat and Josh [in *Mosquitoes*] as incestuous"; he states that although the sculptor Gordon is the only male in *Mosquitoes* who fails to be aroused by the "lush Aphrodite" Jenny—and who is, in fact, aroused exclusively by a living likeness of an epicene torso of his own creation—Gordon is nevertheless not to be regarded as "anything other than thoroughly heterosexual."

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Years ago, when his first book came out, Brooks's Humanist defense would have set more heads nodding than shaking, but these days the most lively critical opinion—voiced by such as Albert Guerard and John T. Irwin—interests itself in exploring the "aberrant" in Faulkner, the undomesticated energies that seem to fuel his fiction-making process. Actually, to see how retrograde Brooks's stance is, we need only ask ourselves who reads Faulkner today, that is, who besides force-fed students and their mentors. Not the general public, surely, but a number of our strongest writers who have made clear their debt to Faulkner: Stanley Elkin for the very idea of the *outre,* John Hawkes for obsessional images of sex and death, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez for the whole Faulknerian ball of wax from misogyny to incest.

In sifting through the Wisdom Collection at Tulane University, however, Brooks came upon materials that have required him to address Faulkner's sexuality more directly. Of special interest is the handbound, unpublished book of fifteen sonnets titled "To Helen: A Courtship." (Five of the poems have seen print, in the *Double Dealer* and *A Green Bough.*) By nicely tracing a network of borrowings and echoes, Brooks shows that the little known allegory *Mayday* and *Mosquitoes*—as well as Faulkner's mixed feelings about "the one fair woman"—owe something to the "courtship" of Helen Baird in 1925–26. Brooks shows that from the start Faulkner knew his chances with Helen were nil. For one thing, scruffy and penniless, Faulkner was not exactly what Helen's mother had in mind for her daughter. For another, Helen herself regarded him at best as "one of her screwballs," and at second best as "a fuzzy little animal." Helen Baird was one of Faulkner's epicene women, with "Her boy's breast and the plain flanks of a boy" (cf. "To Helen," a sonnet); she was, as one character in *Soldiers' Pay* says, "something you want but can't have."

It seems clear that what motivates Faulkner's writing almost from the start—and Brooks shows this rather well, but does not make the point—is "nympholepsy," which the *OED* defines as: "A state of rapture supposed to be inspired in men by nymphs; hence, an ecstasy or frenzy, especially that inspired by something unattainable." Brooks flirts with this point and even notes the similarity between Faulkner's fictional themes and his real life relationships with Estelle Oldham and Helen Baird. He observes, as well, the repeated imaging in the early work—in *Mayday,* in an unpublished story called "Nympholepsy," and in *The Sound and The Fury*—in

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which disillusionment in love or in "the one fair woman" leads to suicide by drowning. He further observes that the repeated helpmate to the hero's death is St. Francis' Little Sister Death, and that, on at least two occasions, immersion in the stream offers not just oblivion but sexual congress with the stream—death itself—which has turned somehow into a woman.

Brooks hits, then runs. He lays out the topography of the weird story "Nympholepsy"—in which the sex and death by water theme is at its most explicit—but he makes little effort to tie it to Faulkner's life or even to locate it in the context of his work and ongoing obsessions. Rather he muddies the focus by retreating to the most stultifying and evasive of critical practices—that is, by offering an abbreviated seminar on the history of an idea: he compares Faulkner's treatment of The Subject of Nympholepsy to Byron's, Browning's, and Swinburne's. He talks provocatively of the seemingly crucial relationships with Helen and Estelle, then preempts the seemingly logical conclusion by saying, "we should be wary of the view that Faulkner's early disappointments in love turned him into a misogynist, a view still too widely held."

Brooks is probably correct, misogyny does not seem to cover Faulkner's case. But we have a right to ask for more from a critic who has had so long and full an association with Faulkner—to ask for more than merely evasive action. Says Brooks, "These complicated issues must, however, await more detailed treatment elsewhere." So it goes. Until "elsewhere" comes along, we are left with Faulkner's tantalizing interjection in *Soldiers' Pay*, "Sex and death, the front door and the back door of the world. How indissolubly are they associated in us."

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ELIZABETH KNIES

I Look Out

and the world is closed tight.
Buckled and numb, I can't speak.
Stars float in an iron kettle
above the moon's struck match.

Where are the colors?
Black is the presence of all
but all falls back
into the shadow-world.

Remember, there is still the garden
under the lights,
lit fountains hundreds of flowers,
nicotiana releasing the essence
of late summer.

There, when you can't sleep
on sultry nights, nothing moves:
not even the tall, frail cosmos
twined in forgetfulness,
not even the lights on the black water.

Legend

We go everywhere. Slats of sunlight
through the trees,
our faces flickering.

This is a procession. Cloth-of-gold,

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carnelian, emerald.
We ride slowly, with dignity.
The green
of the forest surrounds.

You have appeared once again.
My body bears the marks of your love.
My skin smells of you, the scent
of *fraises des bois*.

Circles

The light at this hour
benign, clear.
Swirls in the carpet—
motes in the air
of childhood.

The table you wheeled in the door
in sunlight that day
now here in this room.

Years of light
between us, light years.
I reach out my hand
to that hollow
place. I feel it
as one explores
an old wound, the flesh
bunched and scarred.
The light describes circles
along the wall. I see
things differently now:
each day
transforms
into another day.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Tannhäuser and *Don Carlos*

Our time has witnessed the development of a musical high scholarship and its subsequent penetration into virtually every corner of the musical community. It began with a group of European scholars early in this century whose aim it was to purge the prevailing texts of German symphonic and chamber classics of the accretions of corrupt and wilfully altered editions by returning to manuscripts and original editions, where they existed, and by supplementing such study with careful examination of contemporary scores, documents on composing style and performance practice, and any other material that might yield understanding of the context into which a piece of music fits. The ranks of such music scholars swelled in the years immediately before World War II, and even more so just after it, bringing into being the profession of musicology in the United States and eventually throughout the western world. In these halcyon years the new science was fortunate to find a performing champion in the luminous person of Arturo Toscanini, whose professed ideal (though not always his practice) dovetailed with its own: to realize the composer's intentions, as musicology's was to determine them. Toscanini's influence on subsequent generations of conductors and instrumentalists enlisted many in all walks of musical life under the banner, and the kind of close scrutiny originally applied to the mainstream instrumental classics soon spread to early music of the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, the Baroque, and finally opera. Music lovers at every level of sophistication have derived benefits, witting or unwitting, from this historical movement, and though recently an inevitable reaction to excesses wrought in the name of fidelity to the composer and his text has supplied a necessary corrective, there are still very few musicians, young or old, celebrated or little-known, cerebral or instinctive, who do not subscribe (at least publicly) to the tenets of the "composer's-intentions" school.

It is a sad irony that, while this current has been moving forward in one direction, another has been building in a contrary direction—namely, in the contemporary practice of operatic stagecraft, particularly as it relates to Wagner's works. Whereas our modern musicology begins with the axiom that the composer's score is inviolable and all that is necessary for the intermediary function of the performer is contained therein, much of our modern operatic stagecraft begins with the assumption that the composer's (or librettist's) instructions for staging a work are inadequate or downright deceptive, and must be augmented or even discarded in the pursuit of a work's inner truth. Little wonder then that a schizophrenic quality has pervaded operatic production here and in Europe for twenty years or more. Collaborating on a single production, not uncommonly, were a conductor who scrupulously followed the letter of the score, reluctant often to undertake any deviation from it in the name of interpretation, and a director and his associates responsible for set design, costumes and

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lighting who together swept aside all the score's paraphernalia relating to historical or imagined time and place, action, stage movement, settings, and the like in search of the "real meaning," the "spirit," or the "essence" lurking behind. Admirable as the latter goal might be in the hands of someone like Wieland Wagner, the composer's grandson and the most powerful adherent of this view, whose postwar Bayreuth productions at their most spartan had a fierce radical passion, in the hands of the less inspired it has often been a justification for the arrogant, the fatuous, the didactic, and even the preposterous to be trotted out as revelation. The nadir was surely reached (we can fervently hope!) in the 1976 Bayreuth centennial productions of *The Ring of the Nibelung* of Patrice Chéreau, in which the boards of Wagner's venerable shrine saw a hydroelectric dam instead of the Rhine River depths and Rhinemaiden chippies alternately hustling and hectoring Alberich when the curtain rose on *Das Rheingold*.

In this context the current Metropolitan Opera production of the Paris version of Wagner's *Tannhäuser,* whatever its occasional disappointments, is a triumph, a lesson, and a monument to sanity and artistic sensibility. It is designed by Günther Schneider-Siemssen and directed by Otto Schenk (whose *Fidelio* at the Met in the sixties I admired enormously). Encouraged, one suspects, by James Levine, the Met's young music director, who conducted all the performances last season, the production team takes Wagner's stage directions—and, presumably, the pamphlet "About the Performance of *Tannhäuser,*" which the composer sent to theatres in 1852—literally but not slavishly: sufficient imagination is supplied to flesh out the composer's words in stage pictures and action of satisfying aptness and great beauty. Take Venus' retreat, upon which the curtain rises after the well-known overture. Wagner's libretto describes it this way:

> Amid rosy mists and intoxicating perfumes, nymphs, youths, bacchantes, satyrs, and other denizens of Venus' realm are disporting themselves in the pursuit of sensual pleasure in a manner increasingly furious. Prominent in the scene is the Grotto of Love. Naiads and sirens are frolicking in a lake seen in the background, or reclining on its shores. . . . Youths, goblets in hand, recline on the projecting cliffs; as the curtain rises, nymphs, turned toward the youths, are already dancing seductively before them. The youths presently pair off with the nymphs. . . . A band of bacchantes, dancing in wild abandon, compels the revelers to indulge in ever more extravagantly orgiastic demonstrations. . . .

And so it was at the Metropolitan, the pool and a narrow cascade falling from a great height effectively portrayed, bathed in a dim roseate light behind a scrim whose gauze-like intervention between audience and performers nourished illusion rather than, as is so often the case in circumstances less well suited to its use, simply proving an irritant to eye and ear. The choreography of the Venusberg revels (by Norbert Vesak) was sensuous and languid, unabashedly erotic but never graphic or obtrusive. When Tannhäuser, rejecting the goddess's pleas to tarry, invoked the Virgin, the

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Venusberg gave way to the Thuringian valley instantaneously and persuasively, matching the musical transformation as neatly as Wagner could have wished. (The valley, however, was not verdant: either the shepherd had wishfully misread his calendar—"*Mai ist da!*"—or the area had fallen prey to the medieval equivalent of strip mining.) The second-act Hall of Song, patterned after the real Wartburg, was appropriate as a historical replica and well-nigh perfect as a venue for the scene's action; in it, the principal characters moved easily and forcefully, and the witnessing guests reacted plausibly. Patricia Zipprodt's beautifully fashioned costumes, in blacks, browns, reds, and golds, could have drawn attention to themselves in another, less apt setting, but here were one more aspect of a totally consonant whole. And it was just such an impression that prevailed throughout the evening: all the elements of the work, aural, visual, and what one might call discursive, were fused by Messrs. Levine, Schenk and Schneider-Siemssen into an artistic unit.

None of the singers in the cast I heard was outstanding, but each served his purpose well. James McCracken was Tannhäuser: his voice, though close to a *Heldentenor* in power, has never been much more than serviceable either tonally or technically, and it has now taken on a leathery quality that ill befits a young and passionate knight. Yet he managed it with a good deal of conviction, and, despite a slow start with a plodding Hymn to Venus and a strenuous evening of singing afterward, he delivered the Rome Narrative in the closing pages of the opera with ardor, ring and lyrical intensity. Perhaps he sensed that it was as the ravaged, desperate recusant that his vocal and histrionic resources could make their most telling effect. As Elisabeth, Teresa Kubiak used her *spinto* tone to suggest the heroine's longing and vulnerability, but hers was a one-dimensional portrayal. Miss Kubiak's voice is small for the role, and she tended to reach a *mezzo-forte* dynamic level quickly and stay there. Consequently there was little variety in her singing. Her phrases, too, were short-breathed, probably because she was pushing her voice hard. Grace Bumbry's Venus was not as seductive in tone as in manner, and she too seemed to have a single dynamic level. Vocally, Bernd Weikl, a German baritone making his Metropolitan debut as Wolfram in this production, was the evening's adornment. His is a warm baritone, dark in color yet never gritty, very evenly produced and gracefully manipulated. His "Hymn to the Evening Star" fell short of being memorable because his phrasing was somewhat perfunctory, but I wager he will be one of the great Wolframs in time.

James Levine's orchestra played and his chorus sang as if bent on reaffirming the Met's stature among the opera houses of the world. There was little that was idiosyncratic about the young conductor's leadership—except that, for once, the music seemed to flow naturally, to *sing*, and that is fast becoming Levine's distinction as a conductor. A performance of this caliber is what it takes to redeem the Romantic fustian of *Tannhäuser's* libretto, a gallimaufry of Teutonic history, Norse and classical mythology, and Christian symbolism that must have struck even its first audiences as contrived and hypocritical. For it has life only through Wagner's music,

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and through a physical embodiment that seems to honor its premises rather than scorn them. When the music and the physical embodiment are welded into one as they are at the Metropolitan, suspension of disbelief fortunately comes easily.

Wagner wrote *Tannhäuser* for Dresden (1845) and revised it once for the Elector of Saxony's theater there (1846) before undertaking the more radical reworking for the Paris première (1861). Verdi wrote *Don Carlos* for Paris (on a French libretto, 1867), revised it for Naples (1872), recomposed much of it and severed the first of its five acts for La Scala (the libretto now translated into Italian, 1884), and apparently authorized the attachment of the first act once again to the Scala version for Modena (1886). *Don Carlos* is surely, of all Verdi's operas, the most fruitful field for that high scholarship I described above: in addition to the cited variants, Andrew Porter and David Rosen discovered several unperformed scenes, cut by the composer before the première, in the archives of the Paris Opera a few years ago. From all this has emerged a variorum score, prepared by Ursula Günther and Luciano Petazzoni and published by Ricordi last year.

Claudio Abbado, the young artistic director of La Scala, chose *Don Carlos* to open the bicentennial season of the distinguished Milan opera house late last year, and a film of the production—staged by Luca Ronconi and designed by Luciano Damiani—was broadcast in Europe and has been seen here in private screenings. (A "pirate" stereo tape made from the broadcast circulates in this country, so I have not only seen the Scala staging but possess a reference recording as well. In the late twentieth century, our operatic heritage has attained that state Malraux hailed with his phrase "museum without walls.") From the many choices—seven of the opera's eight scenes are available in more than one form—Abbado and his team stitched together a unique composite: basically a five-act version corresponding to the 1886 Modena version, it incorporates a chorus of French peasants to open the familiar "Fontainebleau forest" first act; a prefix to the Act III garden scene in which Elizabeth and Eboli exchange masks, making plausible Carlos' mistaking the latter for the queen subsequently; a long duet for Carlos, Philip and the chorus after Posa's death in Act IV, utilizing a theme Verdi later improved for the *Lacrimosa* of his Requiem; and a lengthened closing scene with a *pianissimo* curtain. Like the first—Paris—five-act edition (Verdi judged it "as long as *Trovatore* and *Traviata* together), La Scala's new version made a very full evening: four hours and forty-five minutes, with foreshortened intermissions, at the screening I attended. But there was not a moment of tedious music.

Don Carlos is Verdi's broadest canvas. On it he painted historical incident, statecraft, character, ambition, and amorous passion in a wider range of hues than I know of anywhere in opera. Frank Walker's essay in the fifth edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* says:

Nowhere else did Verdi create such an interesting set of characters,

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most of them very complex personalities—the frustrated, almost neurotic Don Carlos; Elizabeth, consistently noble and gracious, but crushed by circumstance and an unhappy, politically expedient marriage; the Princess Eboli, whose love turns to hatred and hatred to remorse; and Philip II of Spain, a truly extraordinary piece of characterization, cruel, suspicious, and yet lonely at heart and not unsympathetic.

Posa, the champion of Flanders in its struggle against oppression by Spain and the Inquisition, may be little more than a mouthpiece for the libertarian ideals of Cavour's and Mazzini's Italy, but his death scene is one of Verdi's most affecting. With all it encompasses, the opera needs room to stretch. No one contends now, in the face of recent Verdi study and repeated performances of the longer version (including the Giulini and Solti recordings), that the four-act *Don Carlos,* the postwar standard in opera houses (Rudolf Bing's Met among them), is satisfactory. It lacks balance and scope; the Fontainebleau act, both text and music, is necessary to set up the convoluted links of commitment and affection between Carlos, Elizabeth, and Philip that create the backdrop of all that follows. Abbado's initiative raises the question strongly whether any of the performing alternatives he chose (or rejected) should be woven into the five-act fabric. For me, the extended versions of the Fontainebleau act, the Act III garden scene, and the closing ensemble were effective on their own, but only the second seems clearly preferable to the customary form. The insertion into Posa's death scene, on the other hand, bloats what is quite stirring in its shorter span.

I will not dwell on the performance, since few readers are likely either to see or hear it (at this writing, there are no plans to distribute the television film here). The singers of the broadcast were Margaret Price as Elizabeth, Placido Domingo as Carlos, Yevgeny Nesterenko as Philip, Renato Bruson as Posa, Elena Obraztsova as Eboli, and Giovanni Foiani as the Grand Inquisitor. All performed admirably, but only Domingo and Bruson were notable, the former for capturing something of the hysteria and volatility of Carlos' troubled mind, the latter for his beauty of tone, smooth legato, and dynamic variety. More than notable was Abbado's conducting: the magnificent score surged forcefully to climaxes and ebbed liltingly away from them, rose and fell with a grace, an elegance of orchestral balance, a suppleness of line married to a poignancy of detail that is rare in my experience. Lamentably, the production was of the kind I described in my opening paragraphs. Ronconi's stage was bare throughout the opera, except for a sarcophagus—the inescapable presence of Charles V—that stayed at center stage. At the rear, a continuous religious procession passed across, its participants bearing emblems of mourning and death, flags, banners, caskets, cars, canopied chairs, and the like. Tolerable, if obvious, symbolism, perhaps—but the effect was jarring and little short of ludicrous when one of the baldachins lingered in its progress long enough for the shot that killed Posa to be fired from it.

The Metroplitan essays *Don Carlos* in the forthcoming season. Levine

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has surely been examining the performing alternatives, and his inquiring mind has pondered the examples of Scala's and other major productions of the recent past. Though a five-act version was originally announced, even that expectation is cloudy as I write: considerations of economy may force the truncated form upon the music director. But whatever shape *Don Carlos* ultimately takes at the Met, it is certain not to gratify thoroughly the vexed opera's most fervent partisans, yet—given Levine's affinity for Verdi—to provide even them with many illuminating moments.

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Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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Reviews

DAVID BROMWICH

A Hogshead of Sense

ACADEMIC CRITICS WHO CAN WRITE FOR THE COMMON READER have become so rare that we ought to celebrate them with something more expressive than awards: a lifetime membership, perhaps, in the Reader's Subscription—or a bronze monument in Harvard Square. W. Jackson Bate is a special case even within his endangered species, because he acquired his reputation without writing down. Apart from the biographies of Keats and Coleridge, and the earlier *Achievement of Samuel Johnson*—from which some of this full-scale critical biography has been quarried[1]—he has published two slender and wonderfully suggestive books of literary history, *From Classic to Romantic* (1946) and *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970). As one reflects on his career, one is amazed at how he has in fact covered, with a *philosophe's* thoroughness, the tremendous stretch of ground that separates Keats and Johnson, and done so in a way that commands the esteem of colleagues as well as readers. He has had the great satisfaction of seeing his largest concerns and recoveries—his sense of the persistence of empiricism in the Romantic tradition, and of the source of the Romantic ordeal of originality in eighteenth-century criticism of the arts—enter the language and finally the commonplace book of criticism. His biography of Keats seemed to many readers, including the present reviewer, the finest literary biography of our time. And another Harvard professor is supposed to have called *Samuel Johnson* "the greatest biography ever written"—a claim that is astounding, given at least one of the rival biographies of Johnson, but that certainly keeps us encouraged in the struggle with our own burdens.

What do we look for in a new biography of Johnson? Or to give it a more Johnsonian point: in the vast and ill-defined area which our stray curiosity patrols in the service of our regular humors, what do we wish that Boswell had not left undone? He shows us why Johnson was a great and good man, why he was at once feared and loved by almost all who encountered him. He does not, however, persuade us of Johnson's *commanding* genuius as a writer; he does not make "the age of Johnson" a more natural designation than we thought it before. About the strange contrasts of Johnson's domestic life, with the Thrales at one extreme and Robert Levett at the other, he has nothing to tell us; and about the still more strange whims by which he chose his intellectual company—Burke, Beauclerk, and everything between, including Boswell himself—he is filled with

[1] SAMUEL JOHNSON, by *W. Jackson Bate.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. $19.95.

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gratitude and silence: he gives us the facts, the savor, the light and shade of Johnson's life, with hardly anything of its emotional logic. Finally, Boswell met Johnson when he was twenty-two and Johnson fifty-three; beyond that, it was a Boswell hungry for precept, as he would always be, who met a Johnson enhanced by the gravity that comes of believing that human life is a condition in which little is to be enjoyed and much to be endured, and believing it since the age of twenty-two; for Boswell, this Johnson was a fact of nature that could hardly be explained by natural history, and for the most part he does not try to explain—there is the splendid image of Johnson's mind as an amphitheatre for gladiatorial combats, but that is only a beginning: he leaves us with the names, dates, and anecdotes of Johnson's early life, but no single theme or perception to connect these years with the figure that life had made of a man at once paternal and childish, whom none of his contemporaries could imagine as a child.

Professor Bate has sought to do more than Boswellian justice to Johnson's literary career, and also to his domestic vicissitudes and "formative influences." On the last of these subjects, which doubtless he began by regarding as secondary, he has the most to say. He is able to isolate two strongly individual temperaments—Cornelius Ford, a slightly older cousin of Johnson's, with literary interests; and Gilbert Walmesley, middle-aged but still receptive to younger men, a Whig lawyer who liked to argue—both of whom appear to have caught Johnson's imagination early, and afterwards held a special place in his affections. These men, and especially Walmesley, looked on intellectual conversation as a kind of jousting, with all pride and honor of the moment for its stakes. From them, it would seem, Johnson learned something of his immoderate love of debate and his insatiable appetite for victory. Physically ungainly, doubtful of his future, already a gifted student of the classics and with a wide though undisciplined knowledge of English literature, Johnson lacked the sense of having a direction which can mean almost everything, when in mid-adolescence he met Ford and Walmesley, who "took him in" with a proprietary firmness. They became—Professor Bate swallows hard but uses the unhappy phrase again and again—his "role models." They were at the opposite pole from the generous but inevitably weaker-willed father whom Johnson's ambitions were always threatening to leave behind, and their world gave him a chance to use his intellectual energy unbridled, and without the fear of insulting. At the same time, beside the self-confident Whig politics of his new companions, the Tory convictions of Johnson's father must have taken on a peculiar poignance. And, though Professor Bate does not make the connection quite explicit, the unresisting Toryism of his later life can be seen as a long-deferred and therefore all the more insistent homage to his father, which in the drama of Johnson's mind must have seemed like a righting of the balance.

On the specific content of Johnson's politics, Professor Bate has nothing to add to Donald Greene's big book. But his treatment of Ford and Walmesley allows us to remark both the shrewdness and the incompleteness of Macaulay's judgment that Johnson was a Tory "not from rational conviction . . . but from mere passion, such as inflamed the

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Capulets against the Montagues." From the truth of this, we can now recognize, it does not follow that Johnson "had become a furious partisan when he could scarcely speak." He formed his convictions by reaction as much as by assimilation—by repeating the old opinions, but also by setting the new ones at defiance—and the second part of this process may have been more important than the first. Nevertheless, Macaulay has set the tone for recent critics who make Johnson's temperament responsible for his thought, in a system of exclusion that we do *not* usually admire in thinkers. With this method of intepreting Johnson, however, Professor Bate is in total sympathy. He understands Johnson in the light of Johnson—seldom in the light of his age. This was clearly a deliberate choice, on the part of one who knows a great deal about the age, and it affords some palpable gains, in passages of stubbornly common-sense analysis. One example ought to be quoted at length: here, Professor Bate is discussing the crisis or "nervous breakdown" that Johnson suffered when his hopes at Oxford were dashed, and he was summoned home to his family.

> He had certainly contributed to his present state of mind in ever having allowed himself to have such exorbitant and unrealistic hopes. But he had begun himself to realize this well before he left Oxford . . . [and] had tried to undercut those hopes and stamp into his imagination a more realistic attitude. In doing so, he had paid rent in advance, so to speak. Why had it done him no good? Perhaps that very effort to cut hope back to size had been the wrong attitude. . . . Certainly, in later years, he was convinced that the misguided self-protection that leads us to expect the worst can be a fearful misuse of the imagination . . . and he was to write perceptively about it, however much a part of him violated his own precept.
>
> Aside from this, a part of him could seem to have sabotaged the whole effort and betrayed him from the start. True, that magical world Cornelius represented—first as a Cambridge don, so negligent and so brilliant, and then in London, among the authors he had known there—had at first seemed possible to enter. . . . But inwardly a part of him had, in self-protection, held back. Cumbersome and awkward, half blind and half deaf, he knew he could never be completely of that world—he had found this out as another part of him had begun to assert itself at the table of Gilbert Walmesley. But more than half of him desperately wanted to be of that world, and had felt released by sharing in it and by the thought of all it seemed to represent.
>
> In any case, the alternative was fearful. And the alternative, of course, was the world of Michael Johnson—bumbling, inefficient, perhaps self-destructive, with associations of failure and defeat permeating everything about him. But far more threatening was the incipient "madness" of the old man, who had long since been so incorporated by the young Johnson's assimilative nature, and made so organic a part of him, that he could never disown it, never amputate it. Any scorn or protest against it was henceforth doomed to be self-scorn and self-conflict. He was the opposite of Goethe, who was able frankly and eagerly to shed influences almost as though they were new suits of clothes.

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Throughout the book, passages such as this, which trace the lineaments of Johnson's temperament, are brought back by careful echoes, and add their own resonance to our sense of Johnson's achievement. The personal independence that still hung in the balance when he returned home, Johnson finally won for himself against all odds; but, even at this early stage, Professor Bate finds symptoms of the crippling "self-demand" that would become Johnson's defining trait. "Self-demand" was the unending psychic toll exacted for his independence: it erupted into violence when, in the words of Arthur Murphy, "his spirits, not employed abroad, turned with inward hostility against himself." In this connection Professor Bate has some acute observations on the *Life of Swift*. For Johnson, he argues, Swift was the terrible example of independence hard-won, and hoarding its gifts with a miser's squint. With his hostility turned inward, Johnson was at least clear of the state in which "benefaction can be but rare, and a tyrannic peevishness is perpetual." He condemned Swift in proportion as he found him an all too plausible kindred spirit. Indeed, "self-demand" is the major theme of this biography, though the scholar who praised it for documenting Johnson's "struggle to transcend self-demand" misunderstood both Johnson and his biographer. There was never a question of transcending self-demand, only of satisfying it, and that only temporarily.

Yet it may be that Professor Bate courts misunderstanding in his transcendent closing sentences: Johnson gave his friends "the most precious of all the gifts one can give another, and that is hope. With all the odds against him, he had proved that it was possible to get through this strange adventure of life, and to do it in a way that is a tribute to human nature." We can imagine Johnson drawing himself up, and replying: "What do you mean, Sir, 'a tribute to human nature'? A tribute is what one country pays out to another, as a token of submission. We are all in *bondage* to our nature, we all pay the tribute. Do you suppose that 'human nature' accepts this as a compliment, or a gratuitous payment? No, Sir. You are to consider, a man who thinks he has much power to raise or depress the level of mankind, has first erected himself into one of the moving powers of nature; he pays the tribute to himself. Clear your mind of this *easy* eloquence." Let us note in passing that the context of Professor Bate's final sentences makes them apply to the manner of Johnson's death. Johnson was the most loveable of men, and we are glad for every instance of his fortitude. But the effort to find heroism in the spectacle of a man desperately clinging to life is childish and unnecessary. Besides, if Johnson died a hero's death, what shall we say of Hume? Infidel Hume felt sure that he would pass away in unmisgiving tranquility, and he did, to Boswell's infinite dismay. Christian Johnson knew that he cherished life less than he feared parting with it, and his last days showed the truth of his self-knowledge. Surely nothing more extravagant need be said.

In passages of psychological analysis, Professor Bate's overriding strength is a certain plainness of tone which we can only imagine being earned by honesty. His weakness, on the biographical side, might be supposed to result from a plan of giving some notice, however perfunctory, to everything in sight. In short, he conveys the impression that he is

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Johnson's *official* modern biographer. He writes a few dutiful sentences on *Taxation No Tyranny*, which does not interest him in the least. On the other hand, he sketches the life of The Club almost in passing. It is an odd lapse: in dealing with Keats's circle, Professor Bate imparted to his readers the warmth and familiarity that he himself obviously felt, and Hunt, Bailey, and Dilke hardly seem, on the face of it, a richer opportunity than Beauclerk, Garrick, Reynolds, Burke, and Goldsmith. Perhaps after all the notion of minimum coverage for everything is a mistake. At any rate, if one compares this biography with Joseph Wood Krutch's volume of 1944—a book much admired in its time, and apparently unknown to Professor Bate's reviewers—one sees how a thoughtful ordering of the chapters, under large essay-topics like Shakespeare, Boswell, and Mrs. Thrale, clears some elbow-room for important digressions and somehow does not prevent the author from beginning at the beginning and ending at the end.

Professor Bate has thirty-two chapters; Krutch had thirteen. But on certain of the large topics, the palm must be allowed to Krutch. In writing of Mrs. Thrale, for example, Professor Bate is judicial, and never misses a step—he convinces us of Johnson's initial helplessness at the breaking up of the family, his unexamined resentment at no longer being the center of things, and at last the partial triumph of his generosity. But Krutch is simple, moving, and rather gallant in his defense of Mrs. Thrale: "In all fairness it must be admitted that she had no choice except that between being cruel to Johnson and cruel to herself. She was aware of the dilemma and unhappy over it. That she chose to be cruel to Johnson is no cause for surprise and no occasion for easy disapproval on the part of any except those who are quite sure they would have done otherwise." After reading and rereading these accounts, an amateur of Johnson scholarship is likely to conclude that Johnson really did expect to marry her. This view has been heaped with derision but it is hard to see why. Boswell wrote a poem for their nuptials. True, Boswell was commonly a fool about such things; but the London papers were alive with gossip to the same effect, and Johnson's grasp of the nature of sexual attraction had never been of the ordinary kind: his willingness to go to any lengths, when taking Henry Thrale's part in a domestic row, looks like a vicarious *husbanding* of Mrs. Thrale, and in a far reach of his imagination it may have been a trial-run. This is a role the guest has been known to play even in American households, and no other explanation begins to make sense either of Johnson's participation in these contests, or of the renewed fury of his bitterness long after the notes of reconciliation had passed between him and Mrs. Thrale.

To the official biographer's plan there unfortunately corresponds an official style. In Professor Bate's case, it is derived in part from the style of his best work—the same slow drawing out of implications, the pause now and then to survey the whole life from one point of view, the ponderous and reassuring movement between abstract statement and evidence—but here, in the service of "accessibility," that style has been allowed to go slack. The result is that he writes at times as if he were the chairman of a

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committee; his status is confirmed in passing references to the other members:

> The place of religion in Johnson's later life . . . cannot be overestimated. His early skepticism about religious belief and his resistance to it—when viewed in the context of his whole life—would therefore be of compelling interest simultaneously to the theologian, the moralist, the psychologist, and the humanist generally—to the humanist concerned (as Johnson himself was) with how and why people become what they are and attain or care for the values they do.

"Simultaneously" is the unexpected touch here; but the curious use of "would be" also deserves attention. *Would* be, *if* what? If we had them all together in the same room? But that makes it seem not only a committee but an academic committee. At this point the common reader is probably saying: "No, that is not what I wanted at all." In a slightly different vein we get the unconscious humor of a well-meaning intellectual tourism: "It is now becoming more widely recognized, in both human and animal psychology, that loyalty in its more extreme forms (of which gratitude is one) is possible only among the more aggressive species." It is no use asking the context since the observation could appear in almost any chapter of any book. This comes of trying to improve the perfectly lucid statement that Johnson's charity was inextricable from his pride. More perplexing than any of these broad-minded gestures, and far more disturbing, is the wholesale adoption of anachronistic usage that weakens our sense of a distinct period, often to the point where its local features vanish entirely. Thus, Professor Bate tells us of Johnson's suspicion of "the attenuated tastes . . . of intellectuals." But "intellectual," the noun, was not part of Johnson's vocabulary: it is a word he did not know (except as a little-used synonym for "intellect"), and would have shunned if he did, with its assumption that thinkers belong to a unified class. The *OED* gives 1813 for the first use in our modern sense; but that is Byron, and the use is largely satiric; not until the late nineteenth century do we find the word in anything like its present form; and it has remained more American than English, because the naming and isolating of this class occur in response to American conditions. There are other misdemeanors in the same line—of these, the "ultrapermissive world" of Abyssinia's Happy Valley is easily the most provocative.

For a book that promises a critical appreciation of Johnson, and laments that Johnson-the-man has for so long eclipsed Johnson-the-writer, this biography contains remarkably little criticism. Anyone looking for help with particular works will be better served by *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*, where the treatment is subtler and as a rule more extended. A puzzling quality of the criticism in *Samuel Johnson* is its reluctance to submit the hero to any of the tests of adversary justice. He would doubtless survive unharmed, and we might learn something from the clash of minds. Boswell was always willing to exhibit Johnson in debate, and even Boswell has been criticized for not recording enough of Burke, who was

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Johnson's only real competition as a talker. Professor Bate, on the contrary, is interested almost exclusively in Johnson's debate with himself, "the powerful back-and-forth movement, where a thing is immediately given its due, stabilized with permanence of phrase, and then qualified with another position given equal justice." That is from a description of the prose of the *Rambler,* about which we have other verdicts, most notably Hazlitt's: "each sentence, revolving around its centre of gravity, is contained with itself like a couplet, and each paragraph forms itself into a stanza. Dr. Johnson is also a complete balance-master in the topics of morality. He never encourages hope, but he counteracts it by fear; he never elicits a truth, but he suggests some objection in answer to it. He seizes and alternately quits the clue of reason, lest it should involve him in the labyrinths of endless error: he wants confidence in himself and in his fellows." He adds that *Rasselas* "is the most melancholy and debilitating moral speculation that ever was put forth."

Nowhere does Professor Bate take note of these strictures or others like them, and argue with a strong opponent. He does, however, appropriate Hazlitt's term "gusto" in an extremely misleading way, as a climax to his discussion of "The Vanity of Human Wishes." Yet Professor Bate, who knows Hazlitt's work about as well as he knows Johnson's, ought to be aware that by gusto Hazlitt did not mean the kind of vigor with abstractions that Johnson shows in his poems. Johnson has nothing of the tact or sensuous delicacy that Hazlitt invented his special word to denote: he is praising the revese of Johnson's kind of genius, and he names Titian, Rubens, Michelangelo, Boccaccio, Rabelais. Again, Professor Bate is familiar with Hazlitt's argument for the innate unselfishness of the imagination—an argument he has summarized expertly, both in his anthology of literary criticism and his biography of Keats—and it is strange to find him summarizing it once more, this time without attribution, as a way of explaining *Johnson's* view of the imagination in the *Rambler.*

Hazlitt's idea was that an artist or moral agent achieves sympathy by an act of imagination, which projects him into a situation different from his own; by such acts of sympathetic identification, he is able to create characters who are not merely self-portraits, or to act unselfishly, since the imagination governs both art and action. If Johnson was a believer in the sympathetic imagination, he could vex his belief with admonitory questionings. We need to remember—and at one time Professor Bate would have been the first to remind us—that for Johnson "imagination" still carried a strong coloring of its earlier meaning, image-making. That meaning is dominant in Locke and co-exists with the new meaning in Hume: the images we make or receive may give us comfort even while they delude us, but they certainly do not tend to make us deeper and wiser. Johnson was of his time in believing that we are at the mercy of imagination for better *and* for worse. At all events, why treat Hazlitt as an ally of Johnson's when it is quite as honest, and so much more interesting, to treat him as a powerful critic?—and an especially revealing one, since he is the greatest figure after Johnson to practice what Johnson would have recognized as journalism. Hazlitt distrusted Johnson's faith in "subordi-

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nation" as a principle of prose and society, and met it head-on. Professor Bate writes a little essay on subordination, and reminds us of Johnson's hatred of the mob-leader Wilkes, and then a page later he has his chance, when he notes that Johnson himself was on one occasion the leader of a mob. This implies an unsuspected depth in Johnson's debate with himself. But nothing is made of it.

A biographer who shares Boswell's veneration for his subject would seem to be defeated at the outset, since he can never compete with the sparks that flew when Boswell's adhesiveness met Boswell's ambition, in the writing as much as in the gathering of material for the *Life*. Inevitably, Professor Bate has reworked an enormous quantity of Boswell's information and anecdotes, and an uncharitable brief against his procedure would sound like this: for its value as entertainment his book depends on our being on terms of only the vaguest familiarity with Boswell; whereas for its liberty in the selection of facts, and its elliptical telling of stories like Johnson's toast to the next slave insurrection in the West Indies, it depends on our reading it as a critical interpretation of a well-inspected portrait. In the end one's objections are outweighed by gratitude for the chance of reading Johnson's life again, with an intelligent guide leading the way. In this book, Professor Bate has written down for the first time and paid heavily for it—but in the course of six hundred pages he performs at more than one level. He closes a discussion of *Rasselas* with the unobliging hint that "in the structure of this deceptively simple tale, there is far more 'art' than used to be thought." He returns a few pages later with an unimprovable sentence about Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare:* "The catharsis, or relief, as in all good drama, lies in the fact that nothing is being disregarded as he walks toward the forgotten obvious."

Johnsoniana come in three kinds—things said about Johnson, things said to Johnson, and things said by Johnson—and no man but a blockhead would complete a review without unwrapping his favorites. (1) One of his friends said that when Johnson's pistol misfired in argument, he walked up and knocked you on the head with the butt-end. (2) *Johnson:* "We are told that the black bear is innocent; but I should not like to trust myself with him." *Gibbon* ("*muttered, in a low tone*"): "I should not like to trust myself with *you*." (3) Riding in a coach, Johnson reflected "how rare a quality good humor is in life," dismissed one by one the names of those Boswell thought good-humored, after which "shaking his head and stretching himself at his ease in the coach, and smiling with much complacency, he turned to me and said, 'I look upon myself as a good humored fellow.' " The reader who can see how these statements are all true and all of a piece has begun to understand Johnson.

Two further comments, which come from outside of Johnson's circle, are unforgettable. An acquaintance from Johnson's Oxford days told him fifty years later: "You are a philosopher, Dr. Johnson. I have tried too in my time to be a philosopher; but, I don't know how, cheerfulness was always breaking in." And a physician on the island of Mull was perhaps more amazed at Boswell's prize performer than even Boswell wished him to be: "This man is just a *hogshead of sense*." For a specimen of Johnson's

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prose, let us turn to this from the *Life of Pope*, which all poets should commit to memory or wear as an amulet:

> Pope, in one of his letters, complaining of the treatment which his poem had found, "owns that such critics can intimidate him, nay almost persuade him to write no more, which is a compliment this age deserves." The man who threatens the world is always ridiculous; for the world can easily go on without him, and in a short time will cease to miss him. I have heard of an idiot who used to revenge his vexations by lying all night upon the bridge. "There is nothing," says Juvenal, "that a man will not believe in his own favor." Pope had been flattered till he thought himself one of the moving powers in the system of life. When he talked of laying down his pen, those who sat round him entreated and implored, and self-love did not suffer him to suspect that they went away and laughed.

Professor Bate's new biography is the sole excuse for bringing together these particular quotations, and why not? It will prompt other readers to their own indulgences; it can stand as a respectable if not quite equal companion to Frederick Pottle's *Boswell*, of which the second volume is still to come; and it forms—to steal a word that is one of Johnson's humbler claims to immortality—a well-*idead* afterword to Boswell's great original.

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VERNON YOUNG

Declarations of Waugh

HE IS ALL THERE, in his initial diary entry at the age of *seven!*

> My History
>
> My name is Evelyn Waugh I go to Heath Mount school I am in the Vth form, Our Form Master is Mr. Stebbing. We all hate Mr. Cooper, our arith. master. It is the 7th day of the Winter Term which is my 4th. Today is Sunday so I am not at school. We always have sausages for breakfast on Sundays I have been watching Lucy fry them they do look funny befor their kooked. Daddy is a publisher he goes to Chapman and Hall office it looks a offely dull plase. I am just going to Church. Alec, my big brother has just gorn to Sherborne. The wind is blowing dreadfully I am afraid that when I go up to Church I shall be blown away. I was not blown away after all.[1]

The clear definition of self; name, number and rank, the social dossier, the date; the reflexive hostility towards schoolmasters (note, however, that he wrote, "*We all* hate Mr. Cooper," therewith sanctioning a private aversion with the unanimity of the group); the suspicious attention to food; the uncanny perception (for a seven-year-old) that a publisher's office might be dull; the Church-going without question but the momentary misgiving about nature—which, in the event, proves to be assailable; he wasn't blown away, after all: verily, the child—this child—is blueprint to the man. By the age of twelve his prose can fairly be called sophisticated, as can his preferences and his disapprovals. He is already a loving connoisseur of ecclesiastical architecture ("mad lovely old church") and an unsparing mocker of childish inadequacy.

> We went up to Southend in the morning and spent a small fortune at the slots. Then we took a train to Prittlewell. It is a sweet little village with old houses with wobbly roofs. And a mad lovely old church. There is still the little staircase in the wall leading up to where the Rood-Screne ought to be. There is a lovely black oak carved fourteenth century door. After tea I and Girlie then had a single at Babmington and were soon joined by Nora and Jessie and Mrs. Paine. Then Mrs. Freeman turned up with an atrocity of about seven and spoilt our game. Whenever he "no-served" she used to say, "Never mind darling try again."

Comedy—the kind Waugh was to practice—is born in disdain, in the irreversible gift, or curse, of seeing things steadily and not seeing them whole. The quick clear impulse towards condescension, the conditioned

[1] THE DIARIES OF EVELYN WAUGH, ed. *Michael Davie*. Little, Brown. $17.50.

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reflex of snobbery—which was part and parcel of the British public-school system—became the animating instrument of his humor. Whoever insists on the prim definition of a gentleman as one who never willingly causes pain will write down Waugh as a monster, for he certainly considered himself a gentleman—his best-dressed principles prove it—yet he was inexorably dedicated by his talent willingly to cause pain. His intolerance is the source of our delight. The temper of his prose is distinguished by the selective power of his modifiers, especially by his fortification of the executive adjective with superlative adverbs: "damnably absurd," "indecently curious," "a truly fatuous subject," "perfectly beastly house," "terrible effusions of style," "an appalling English film," "inconceivably ill-disciplined children," "an odious American friend," "a day of ineffable boredom," "exceedingly weary afternoon," "four days of degrading boredom."

As the Diaries accumulate, this periodic emphasis on *boredom* increases, no matter how socially dense, diversified or (in the tropics) dangerous, his days may be. He claimed never to have been bored when he was a child, yet as his capacity for sensation waxes and, after college, if not indeed while there, his days, nights, months become an indefatigable montage of visiting, gourmandizing, drinking himself blind, theater-going, novel-writing, traveling, debating and many other gerundive activities we can only surmise if, by rare chance, he has not documented them, the arresting complaint of *boredom* always intrudes when, for an unguarded hush he is exposed to the full brunt of company he didn't choose, of an hour when the last bar has closed or of a book he has injudiciously packed for an ocean journey (or a mule trek—as in Brazil where he spends "boring" hours, in between grindingly exhaustive foot-miles through jungle, stuck—he blandly admits—with Thomas Aquinas or the sermons of Bossuet or *The Pickwick Papers* (his inspiration for the terminal pages of *A Handful of Dust*).

You might say he had a talent for boredom: the condition became the provenance of his devastating treatment, on the page and frequently in the flesh, of other personalities and desolate places. *Boredom* is not perhaps the covering word; he doesn't bore *us* with his claims to boredom. *Impatience* might better serve: a form of stupendous *déja vu*, as if he knew the consequences of everything in advance, yet not sufficiently in advance to avoid them. One warms to the suggestion of reincarnation as the only adequate probability to explain the unveiled candor with which Waugh faced the phenomena of his teeming fellowmen. At the same time he was personally addicted to, unarguably and agreeably conditioned by, the customs of the tribe, framing his acidulous observations within the rules of the caste into which he had been born. And it is just this combination—not an unusual one in the England of this breakup century—which, to an advanced degree, accounts for the identifiable flavor of Evelyn Waugh: an imperviously fervent conservative who articulated the withering insight of someone born outside all categories of class.

To write him off as superficial, as he has been written off by critics with a sophomoric nostalgia for the safe, exclusive domain of the profound, is

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merely to reject him for not having been a Russian novelist or D. H. Lawrence. He was a wit in the line of Congreve, Pope, and Auden; he revered Henry James. The Diaries *fill in* the gaps left between the novels or between those and the four travel books he published between 1929 and 1935; they do *not,* intensively, explain or disclose states of mind not inferrable by the fiction, but they embrace, in a tentacular fashion, the immense amount of experience which was impersonally distilled to make *Vile Bodies* and *A Handful of Dust* and *Officers and Gentlemen* and *The Ordeal of Gilbert Pinfold.* They seem to have functioned primarily as a compendium of raw material from which the several other books were derived. To a considerable degree, since they seldom expose what Waugh could not exhibit in the novels or the travel journals, they must have been also the expressions of a lifelong compulsion which, if not exercised daily, made their author fret; constantly he excuses himself—*to whom?*— for not having anything to write down for days at a time. Every passing transaction shows up—buying a tie or a walking-stick, having a meal, getting a haircut, catching a train—and of course those camera-eye and microphone-ear close-ups of the numerous mortals he found incredible or insupportable.

> Some time ago an American from Cambridge wrote to ask me for an interview. I said if he would come here I would see him. Today he came. A very very humourless Boston Irishman. All the topics he raised bored me so much I would only say, "No. No."
>
> "Do you consider that in a democratic age the radio and cinema will develop into great arts?"
>
> "No. No."
>
> "Do you think the reniassance villain represents the individual at war with society?"
>
> "No. No."
>
> "Do publishers have an influence on modern writing comparable to the patron of the eighteenth century?"
>
> "No. No."
>
> Then I ordered him eggs for tea as he had a long journey back and he spilt one on his trousers. I gave him sherry and a copy of *Campion* and sent him back on his long journey to Cambridge.

Tempting as it is to quote a dozen such vignettes of Waugh's vigilant malice or his *sang-froid,* it would be misleading to subordinate the weightier concerns of the Diaries which, as the century advances into regression, are pregnant with history being made and a style of life being un-made or at least being submitted to fearful strain. The individual reader of these 793 pages will gravitate towards whichever phase he finds most rewarding to his interests: the unique and copious accounts of Waugh's student-and-instructor period (Michael Davie has noted that "Waugh seems to be the only writer of the first rank—or indeed of any rank—to have preserved a day-by-day record of school life while it happened"); the years of early maturity and almost fanatical dissipation which are icily reproduced in the Mayfair novels; the marvellous travel pages, preserved from several

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periods, which are enthralling to compare with the form they took when transformed for publication;[2] the World War II chronicles, exhaustive (and officially forbidden) bulletins of preparation for war and the war, itself, much of which was crystallized in *Officers and Gentlemen*; and, scattered throughout, but never consolidated as an apologia which, we may be sure, he would have frowned on as vulgar, Waugh's very occasional, always sensible, judgments about the craft of writing and the art of living.

> *Abjuring the realm.* To make an *interior* act of renunciation and to become a stranger in the world; to watch one's fellow-countrymen as one used to watch foreigners, curious of their habits, patient of their absurdities, indifferent to their animosities—that is the secret of happiness in this century of the common man.

He was far from prepared *wholly* to abjure the realm when he wrote these lines but the intention must have been gratifying and it no doubt contributed to an inner repose of which he was patently in need and which, one suspects, was not invariably supplied by the tenets of Catholicism.

Never did he need that repose more than in 1944 when, having survived, among other expeditions, the terrible Battle of Crete, he was sent to Yugoslavia, with Randolph Churchill as his senior-in-command of the British Military Mission to Tito's Partisans. This must have been the key anti-climax in his charmed life. The plane from Bari crashed on landing and Waugh was evidently thrown into a cornfield. When he regained consciousness, on a stretcher, he learned that the air commodore was dead, and he heard Churchill crying because his servant had been killed and begging for morphine to quiet the pain in his legs. "At last we bedded down in some straw . . . and woke next day very stiff, particularly in the neck, no appetite or energy, no pain." Again: he "wasn't blown away after all." He survived to endure the bizarre ambience of Croatia during the crucial days when the German occupation was being replaced by the British and the Yugoslavs were more intent on fighting one another than on any international issue. Apart from the occasional scenic wonder, Waugh found little to say a civil word for; the weather, the Partisans and the Russian collaborators he experienced as equally detestable.

> On Monday last we were asked in the morning to a banquet that evening, given to celebrate an exchange of decorations between the general staff and the Russian mission. We met at 9 p.m. and found elaborately decorated tables and covers for at least a hundred. I sat next to the monoglot commissar and a dreary English-speaking Communist journalist. Dinner, very good, took three hours; then there were speeches and then a theatrical entertainment of gruesome character. We got back at 4 a.m. The entertainment consisted of rousing choruses in Russian, Jugoslav, and a language said to be English; a propaganda playlet from the Russian about a boy getting a medal from the state

[2] Selections from *A Bachelor Abroad*, *They Were Still Dancing*, *Ninety-Two Days* and *Waugh in Abyssinia* were published by Little, Brown in 1947. A fifth book, on Mexico, Waugh was "content to leave in oblivion, for it dealt little with travel and much with political questions."

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> school; a dialogue between Hitler and Reaction, played by a kind of witch; and a play about a cowardly soldier who becomes brave through shooting a German. My Communist neighbor said, "You see in spite of war we have the arts."

As the winter wore on, Waugh found the company of Randolph Churchill, to which he was physically confined for months on end, almost as stultifying as the internecine quarrels of the Yugoslavs and the ideological banalities of official Communism.

> At luncheon Randolph and Freddy became jocular. They do not make new jests or even repeat their own. Of conversation as I love it—a fantasy growing in the telling, apt repartee, argument based on accepted postulates, spontaneous reminiscences and quotation—they know nothing. All their noise and laughter is in the retelling of memorable sayings of their respected fathers or other public figures; even with this vast repertoire they repeat themselves every day or two—sometimes within a hour. They also recite with great zest the more hackneyed passages of Macaulay, the poems of John Betjeman, Belloc, and other classics. I remarked how boring it was to be obliged to tell Randolph everything twice—once when he was drunk, once when he was sober. . . .

Curious sequels follow this entry. Despite his damaging judgment of Randolph Churchill (there is more than I have quoted, mercilessly focused) Waugh's friendship with him, while modified, was not radically impaired after their return to postwar England. Up to the last, however, Churchill was a choice target of Waugh's outrageous acerbity. In March, 1964, when the Diaries are fraying out, Waugh noted that Churchill had been taken to hospital to have a lung removed; the character of his ailment was described as "not malignant."

> I remarked that it was a typical triumph of modern science to find the only part of Randolph that was not malignant and remove it. Ed repeated this to Randolph whom I met on my return from Rome, again in White's. He looked so pale and feeble and was so breathless that we there and then made up our estrangement of some twelve years.

Two years later, Waugh was dead; two years after him, so was Churchill. As for "Freddy," that is Frederick, second earl of Birkenhead, he explained to the editor of these Diaries in 1974 that, in Yugoslavia, when confronted with the alternative of sleeping in the same room with R. C. or outside with rats, he chose Randolph "by a narrow margin." Further, he added that Waugh was a "viper." This is all the more mystifying in view of his previous contribution, "Fiery Particles," to *Evelyn Waugh and His World*,[3] a judicious and far from disparaging essay at explaining, among other ambiguities, Waugh's predisposition to War.

[3] EVELYN WAUGH AND HIS WORLD, ed., *David Pryce-Jones* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973).

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> His extraordinary love affair with the army was more difficult to fathom and to me remained baffling to the end. No less probable conformist to the institutional life could have been imagined. One would have thought that his fastidious mind would have been repelled by enforced and continuous association with uncongenial people. . . .

The Earl of Birkenhead's incredulity was somewhat disingenuous. Waugh, since childhood, had been a "conformist to the institutional life": to the Catholic Church by mental consent, to the public school and the army by physical surrender; always, of course, he had reserved the British privilege of breaking the rules and giving voice to scathing dissent. Yet that "fastidious mind" was housed in a tenement of clay. I don't think I am reaching for an esoteric interpretation if I suggest that the Earl's term, "love affair," was on target. Waugh's concession to "enforced and continuous association" was more than likely a gesture of unresolved homosexuality. One sees the same kind of compulsion in T. E. Lawrence, another "fastidious mind" that voluntarily associated itself with "uncongenial people." His diary, *The Mint,* may be compared with Waugh's. Stylistically, they are worlds apart—the Mannerist and the Palladian—but the implications are conspicuously akin. While the pages of Waugh betray no trace of Lawrence's lingering over the male anatomy in studied phrases of baroque euphemism, intermittently in Waugh's school diaries and in the World War II memoirs there are not a few brutally casual references to sodomy among his fellows. In some cases it is not altogether clear now successfully Waugh was unimplicated.

Yet there is insufficient warrant for deducing that Waugh's grueling efforts to excel, when young, at athletics and, later, to excel as an explorer or a man-at-arms, were over-compensations for feelings of sexual guilt. The proposition is a shade too neat; such efforts might equally well, together with the heavy drinking, have been desperate measures taken to atone for an extreme emotional diffidence.

Unquestionably, a motive inexplicable by the demands of journalism or by an infatuation with the exotic drove Waugh into taking unnecessarily arduous journeys (such as the Brazilian) into inhumanly squalid backcountry, where at best he was "bored," at worst endangered by typhus or gangrene. Clearly he does not appear to have been entranced by what Graham Greene, in *Journey Without Maps,* named symbolically as The Coast, a halfway station on the road to picturesque degradation. If Waugh was subconsciously searching for a heart of darkness he never found it. What he found, most of the time, in the Congo and in Abyssinia as in Brazil and India was heat, hyenas, subcultures, unpalatable native concubines, fumed oak and dusty umbrellas in a Holy of Holies, and boring gospellers (like a certain Padre Ball who "talked a lot of rot about India. He is a very kind, stupid man believing deeply in world brotherhood."). *A Handful of Dust* equated by implication the Brazilian jungle and the society of Mayfair. Waugh did not, at heart, believe in his own metaphor; it was created for the sake of the story. *Even though* he found many of his colleagues as grotesque as the minions of Haile Selassie or the king of Uganda, whose wife was a whore, he behaved in what we are wont to call

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the last analysis as if correct standards were supplied by his own social structure and by the premises of its education.

The full force of what he believed in stands out authentically in such a passage as this, when, after days of traveling in primitive discomfort and making telegraphic notes with no syntactical fluency or informing transitions, he arrives at Elizabethville, and the structured sentences illustrate his relief upon returning to a world of conspicuous waste and coherence.

> These stimulating re-encounters with luxury! How often in London when satiety breeds skepticism, one has begun to wonder whether luxury is not a put-up job, whether one does not vulgarly confuse expense with excellence. Then, with one's palate refined by weeks of (comparative) privation, of nameless and dateless wines, cigars from Borneo or the Phillipines, one meets again the good things of life and knows certainly that taste, at least in these physical matters, is a genuine and integral thing. Reconciliation.
>
> Visited excellent cinema.

This is one Waugh I find irresistible, the sybarite at sunset, without democratic cant, who knows that neither barbarians from the North nor Christians from the desert will improve the Empire, they can only destroy it. Meanwhile, reconciliation and an excellent cinema. Another Waugh, not radically divergent, comes into sudden close-up during an encounter he records in the War Diaries and reveals the man, as he wanted to be, and probably was at moments when everyone else was threatening to panic. This took place in the inferno of Crete when the beleaguered British were close to demoralization, harried by reconaissance planes, suffering from hunger, exhaustion and general breakdown of authority.

> At Imvros there was some attempt at organization. . . . There was a great quantity of motor trucks in the village and I went forward to try to get some sent back to lift our men down the mountain. An officer leaped across the road shouting at me, "Get back there." I asked who was in charge of movement control. He said, "I am. You can't come any further." I began asking him about trucks. Then he said he had nothing to do with movement control. I said, "You musn't let your nerves affect your manners." He grew combative and said, "What exactly do you mean by that?" I told him exactly. "You may be very frightened but you must try to be polite."

That charming admonition engrosses a cultural history, conjures an entire *ars poetica*. "You may be very frightened but you must try to be polite."

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MARVIN MUDRICK

Portnoy's Bachelor Uncle

In July 1916 Kafka was on vacation—really a trial marriage—with his fiancée in Marienbad, and it seems to have been the best time of his life. It had begun as badly as usual: "What kind of person am I! What kind of person am I! I am tormenting her and myself to death," he wrote to Max Brod.[1] (He was the kind of person who three years earlier, thinking about marrying Felice, noted in his diary, "Coitus as punishment for the happiness of being together"; who also, telling Brod he had to break with Felice though he loved her, confessed in anguish that "when I want to disgust myself I have only to imagine placing my arm around a woman's waist.") But this time was different, Felice didn't leave or give up, "the rat [he means himself] had been driven to its very last hole" (if you'll please pardon the expression, and how's that for a howler from a writer as watchful and scrupulous as Kafka who moreover, according to Brod, would never countenance the "dirty" or "vulgar"? but he had taken his eye off the words because, as the words confirm, nothing mattered for the moment except Felice whom he considered his last chance—he was thirty-three—for marriage and a family and ordinary life), no doubt he bared his little teeth but this time Felice couldn't be frightened or repelled. So he recklessly reported that "we arrived at a human relationship of a kind I had so far never known and which came very near . . . to the relationship we had achieved at the best periods of our correspondence," his side of which incidentally, during the four years since they had met, had consisted of deliberate, powerful, and convincing efforts to prove his incapacity for any relationship at all:

> Haven't I for months now been squirming before you like something poisonous? Am I not here one moment, there the next? Are you not beginning to feel sick at the sight of me? Can you not see by now that if disaster—yours, your disaster, Felice—is to be averted, I have to remain locked up within myself? I am not a human being; I am capable of tormenting you cold-bloodedly, you whom I love most, whom I love alone out of the entire human race (as far as I'm concerned, I have no relatives and no friends, am unable to have them, and don't want them), and cold-bloodedly allowing you to forgive the torments I inflict. Can I tolerate this situation when I am in a position to see it so clearly, have suspected it, find my suspicions confirmed, and continue to suspect it? If need be, I can live as I am, my rage turned inward, tormenting only by letter, but as soon as we lived together I would become a dangerous lunatic fit to be burned alive. . . .

[1] LETTERS TO FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND EDITORS, by *Franz Kafka*. Schocken. $24.50.

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Now however in Marienbad he sounds like anybody else, like a hero of chivalry or an ordinary man: "Basically I have never had that kind of intimacy with a woman . . . but now I saw the look of trustfulness in a woman's eyes, and I could not fail to respond." Such sentiments occur nowhere else in the four volumes of his letters available in English. True, even here he has some characteristic recollections: "When she came toward me in the big room to receive the engagement kiss, a shudder ran through me," and "I have never feared anything so much as being alone with F. before the wedding"; but, in his most uncharacteristic summing up ever, "Now all that has changed and is good," and he concludes with a unique image of himself settled at last in the hitherto unimaginable toils of domesticity:

> an apartment of two or three rooms in some Berlin suburb; each to assume economic responsibilities for himself. F. will go on working as she has done all along, while I—well, for myself I cannot yet say. Should one try to visualize the situation, there is the picture of two rooms somewhere in Karlshorst, say, in one of which F. wakes up early, trots off, and falls exhausted into bed at night, while in the other room there is a sofa on which I lie and feed on milk and honey. So there the husband lolls about, the wretched and immoral lout (as the cliché has it). Nevertheless, in this there is calm, certainty, and therefore the possibility of living. . . .

When Felice went back to her job in Berlin, Kafka stayed on in Marienbad another week; and, as if circumstances were now going to arrange themselves for his pleasure and benefit, the Hasidic Rabbi of Belz happened to be visiting there: "He looks like the Sultan in a Doré illustration of the Münchausen stories which I often looked at in my childhood. But not like someone masquerading as the Sultan, really the Sultan. . . . One eye is blind and blank. His mouth is twisted awry, which gives him a look at once ironic and friendly. He wears a silk caftan which is open in front; a broad belt above his waist; a tall fur hat, which is the most striking thing about him . . ."; but, though his followers assure the onlookers that when it's raining it always stops as soon as the Rabbi arrives to take his evening stroll, "this time the rain did not stop," in fact it poured and poured. Kafka's account to Brod is full of curiosity, skepticism, amusement, affection, delight, and envy:

> There are four . . . "intimates"—employees, secretaries. The highest of the four, according to Langer [a friend of Kafka's and one of the Rabbi's followers], is an exceptional rogue; his huge belly, his smugness, his shifty eyes seem to bear that out. However, one must not hold this against him, for . . . people cannot endure the continual presence of the rabbi without suffering damage. It is the contradiction between the deeper meaning and the unrelenting commonplaceness that an ordinary head cannot sustain.

This of course isn't what Kafka himself thinks but rather a synopsis of the

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stubborn piety of those rained-on followers; the "contradiction" is theirs, not his, and in what comes next he contradicts it instantly by going back to their clear and irrepressible source:

> [The Rabbi] inspects everything, but especially buildings; the most obscure trivialities interest him. He asks questions, points out all sorts of things. His whole demeanor is marked by admiration and curiosity. All in all, what comes from him are the inconsequential comments and questions of itinerant royalty, perhaps somewhat more childish and joyous. At any rate they reduce all thinking on the part of his escort to the same level. Langer tries to find or thinks he finds a deeper meaning in all this; I think that the deeper meaning is that there is none and in my opinion this is quite enough. It is absolutely a case of divine right, without the absurdity that an inadequate basis would give to it.

There is, then, no contradiction between the deeper meaning and the unrelenting commonplaceness not because an ordinary head can't resolve it but because to begin with there isn't a deeper meaning, which is what the pious think that for their own redemption they have to scratch and salvage out of all the commonplaceness, which on the other hand is what the master pays attention to because he suspects it's all there is, as when the Rabbi examines the New Bathhouse:

> Behind the building, which is where we go first, is a sort of ditch in which run the pipes for the steambath. The rabbi bends over the railing and cannot take his eyes off the pipes, concerning which various opinions and counteropinions are exchanged.
>
> The building is of a neutral and indefinable eclectic style. The ground floor consists of a sort of blind arcade with a window set in every arch, and each vertex ornamented by an animal head. All the arches and all the animal heads are uniform. Nevertheless the rabbi comes to a halt before each of the six arches of the building's side, studies them, compares them, and passes judgment on them, from close up and from a distance.
>
> We turn the corner and are now standing before the façade. The building makes a great impression on him. Golden letters over the door read NEW BATHHOUSE. He has the inscription read to him, asks why the building is called this, whether it is the only bathhouse, how old it is, and so forth. He repeatedly says with that characteristic East European Jewish wonderment: "A handsome building."
>
> All along he has been taking note of the rain gutters . . .

—and not necessarily because the imperturbable rain is still pouring down on this perfect tourist.

Marienbad faded; Kafka kept losing touch with the commonplace, which meaning kept trying to redeem; his work became more and more saturated with meaning till it crystallized into the late collections of aphorisms: e.g. "There is a goal but no way; what we call a way is hesitation." Advice for Hamlet, rapists, and murderers: what would the

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itinerant Rabbi have made of it? except, though he wouldn't have bothered, to turn it inside out like a glove that fits any occasion—There is a way but no goal; what we call a goal is meaning. Kafka envied the Rabbi's singleness and sometimes grew confident enough to claim it for himself. When Martin Buber was about to publish "Jackals and Arabs" and "A Report to an Academy" in *Der Jude,* Kafka asked him "not to call the pieces parables; they are not really parables. If they are to have any overall title at all, the best might be 'Two Animal Stories.' " Yet the first is a grim and shiny engine of meaning, nothing but pairs of terms (carrion and fresh meat, slaves and overseers, hope and custom) for the pious, a parable par excellence; the second does have some of Kafka's comic invention and some narrative impulse, but meaning leaks out at every seam.

Because the Rabbi of Belz is a Jew who can live in a world without meaning, he exposes Kafka's duplicity and even breaks it down for a moment in the momentary euphoria of Marienbad. But Kafka would say that this explanation contains a tautology, that to be a Jew (even if not a venerated rabbi) is it goes without saying to be able to live like a Sultan in a world without meaning; that Gentiles who reproach Jews for being "anxious," though they are right about Kafka, are wrong about Jews ("The strangest thing," in view of all the reasons Jews have for feeling nervous in Gentile communities, "is that in general the reproach does not fit"); that therefore Kafka isn't a Jew ("What have I in common with the Jews when I have scarcely anything in common with myself?"), he's a changeling in his father's house.

In which, notwithstanding, he has his own room and from time to time—for instance, here at the age of thirty—sounds like an early Philip Roth character coping with Mama:

> Later she asked me if I were going to write to Uncle Alfred, he deserved it. I asked why he deserved it. He has telegraphed, he has written, he has your welfare so much at heart. "These are simply formalities," I said, "he is a complete stranger to me, he misunderstands me entirely, he does not know what I want and need, I have nothing in common with him."
>
> "So no one understands you," my mother said, "I suppose I am a stranger to you too, and your father as well. So we all want only what is bad for you."
>
> "Certainly you are all strangers to me, we are related only by blood, but that never shows itself. Of course you don't want what is bad for me."

—and with Papa ("From your armchair you ruled the world," Kafka wrote bitterly in his *Letter to His Father*[2]):

[2] According to the Publisher's Note in the bilingual edition (Schocken, 1953), Kafka "wrote this letter in November, 1919. Max Brod relates that Kafka actually gave the letter to his mother to hand to his father. . . . Probably realizing the futility of her son's gesture, the mother did not deliver the letter, but returned it to the author." Thank God.

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> I spent most of the day in bed [he writes to Felice], and the only two, though terrible, adventures were caused by my father who gradually, and despite all resistance, dragged me firmly out of my morning sleep back into this bleak world with his insane, monotonous, incessant shouting, singing, and hand-clapping, which he repeated over and over again to amuse a great-nephew, while in the afternoon he carried on in the same way to entertain his grandson. . . .

(Father, a big, strong, handsome, sarcastic man who ran a small business with an iron hand, was a butcher's son and indignantly disappeared behind his newspaper at the dinner table while Franz, a long solemn stringbean weighing 120 pounds, picked at his vegetarian plate. In his diary he noted "the whimpering of my poor mother because I don't eat"; or while he was writing to Felice his mother would interrupt him by coming "into my room crying . . . she caresses me, wants to know what's the matter with me, why I don't talk at meals." But there are problems even in Gentile families. Kleist was a writer whom Kafka not only greatly valued but, since he too had been unappreciated by his unintellectual family, felt a personal sympathy for: "On the 21st," begins the diary entry for November 23, 1911, "the hundredth anniversary of Kleist's death, the Kleist family had a wreath placed on his grave with the epitaph: 'To the best of their house.' " Some day Mama and Papa would be sorry.)

"In the next room," Kafka noted on March 24, 1912, "my mother is entertaining the L. couple. They are talking about vermin and corns. (Mr. L. has six corns on each toe.) It is easy to see there is no real progress made in conversations of this sort." With close friends Jewish mothers would sometimes unburden themselves about domestic commonplaces: corns, bunions, varicose veins, bedbugs, cockroaches, mice. Later in the same year Kafka took the hint and began writing *The Metamorphosis* ("the bedbug story," his publisher called it), an animal story which isn't a parable because the interest is in what's happening, not in why it happens or what it all means. Misfortunes happen in the best of families: fathers have to stop working, daughters don't get married, sons wake up one morning transformed into gigantic vermin; keeping things clean, orderly, and cheerful is hard enough anyhow, and it doesn't help to criticize from the next room just because you crave privacy:

> His mother once subjected his room to a thorough cleaning, which was achieved only by means of several buckets of water—all this dampness of course upset Gregor too and he lay widespread, sulky and motionless on the sofa—but she was well punished for it. Hardly had his sister noticed the changed aspect of his room that evening when she rushed in high dudgeon into the living room and, despite the imploringly raised hands of her mother, burst into a storm of weeping, while her parents—her father had of course been startled out of his chair—looked on at first in helpless amazement; then they too began to go into action; the father reproached the mother on his right for not having left the cleaning of Gregor's room to his sister; shrieked at the sister on his left that never again was she to be allowed to clean Gregor's room; while the mother

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tried to pull the father into his bedroom, since he was beside himself with agitation; the sister, shaken with sobs, then beat upon the table with her small fists; and Gregor hissed loudly with rage because not one of them thought of shutting the door to spare him such a spectacle and so much noise.

"Kafka is important to us," said Auden, "because his predicament is the predicament of modern man." This is the sort of pronouncement made about Kafka by numerous top names, and it would be interesting to know whether any of them actually believed that modern man's predicament is to love women but loathe sex; to love the idea of marriage and family but loathe his father, despise his mother, and feel like filth in their presence or proximity; to be a kind and decent person but have lurid and persistent fantasies about guilt, torture, and execution; to insist on explaining things to death as if his very life depended on it. (Psychoanalytic critics, who are wary of what people merely *say*, will remind us that Kafka was after all typical, *loved* his mother too, *loved* his father too, had *ambivalent* feelings that stemmed from . . . ; but they wouldn't have made much of an impression on Kafka, who believed that psychoanalysis had gone off the track when it began to imagine it was a branch of medicine rather than a mode of romance: "I consider the therapeutic part of psychoanalysis to be a hopeless error.") Sometimes Kafka could turn his private preoccupations into a comedy of barely disrupted domesticity, what happens when the commonplace has one screw loose or missing: the loathsome and irritable insect clinging to its memory of humanness; the underground creature of *The Burrow* that dedicates its life to manufacturing the world's safest hole in the ground—

If only I had someone I could trust to keep watch at my post of observation; then of course I could descend in perfect peace of mind. I would make an agreement with this trusty confederate of mine that he would keep a careful note of the state of things during my descent and for quite a long time afterwards, and if he saw any sign of danger knock on the moss covering, and if he saw nothing do nothing. With that a clean sweep could be made of all my fears, no residue would be left, or at most my confidant. For would he not demand some counter-service from me; would he not at least want to see the burrow? That in itself, to let anyone freely into my burrow, would be exquisitely painful to me. I built it for myself, not for visitors, and I think I would refuse to admit him, for either I must let him go in first by himself, which is simply unimaginable, or we must both descend at the same time, in which case the advantage I am supposed to derive from him, that of being kept watch over, would be lost. And what trust can I really put in him? Can I trust one I have had under my eyes just as fully when I can't see him, and the moss covering separates us? It is comparatively easy to trust anyone if you are supervising him or at least can supervise him; perhaps it is even possible to trust someone at a distance; but completely to trust someone outside the burrow when you are inside the burrow, that is, in a different world, that, it seems to me, is impossible.

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A consciousness that keeps eating itself up and always has something left over to chew on: like Dostoevsky's underground man, who boasts, "I have an explanation for everything, don't you worry"; who confides, "I should like to tell you . . . why I've never been able to become even an insect" (till Kafka, taking a hint from his mother, showed how); who describes himself as "an intensely conscious mouse" that whenever challenged scurries back to "its stinking, disgusting, subterranean hole"; who confesses that "though innocent I was guilty and, as it were, guilty according to the laws of nature." Dostoevsky declared that all of Russian fiction had come out of the sleeve of Gogol's *Overcoat* (though in fact only Dostoevsky's did); sometimes it seems unavoidable to infer that Kafka and his preoccupations crawled full-grown out of the "dark cellar" of *Notes from Underground,* where for example Dostoevsky's protagonist preëmpts the reader's right to squash him by exercising it conclusively himself:

> "But aren't you ashamed? Don't you feel humiliated?" you will perhaps say, shaking your head contemptuously. "You long for life, yet you try to solve the problems of life by a logical tangle! And how tiresome, how insolent your tricks are, and, at the same time, how awfully frightened you are! You talk a lot of nonsense and you seem to be very pleased with it; you say a lot of impudent things, and you are yourself always afraid and apologizing for them. You assure us that you are afraid of nothing, and at the same time you try to earn our good opinion. You assure us that you are gnashing your teeth, but at the same time you crack jokes to make us laugh. You know your jokes are not amusing, but you seem to be highly pleased with their literary merit. You may perhaps have really suffered, but you don't seem to have the slightest respect for your suffering. There may be some truth in you, but there is no humility. You carry your truth to the market place out of the pettiest vanity to make a public show of it and to discredit it. No doubt you mean to say something, but you conceal your last word out of fear, because you haven't the courage to say it, but only craven insolence. You boast about your sensibility, but you merely don't know your own mind. For though your mind is active enough, your heart is darkened with corruption, and without a pure heart there can be no full or genuine sensibility. And how tiresome you are! How you impose yourself on people! The airs you give yourself! Lies, lies, lies!"

Or, as Kafka describes himself in his *Letter to His Father*: "my cold indifference, scarcely disguised, indestructible, childishly helpless, approaching the ridiculous, and brutishly complacent, the indifference of a self-sufficient but coldly imaginative child, I have never found anywhere else; to be sure, it was the sole defense against destruction of the nerves by fear and by a sense of guilt. All that occupied my mind was worry about myself. . . ."

What Auden must have intended by "the predicament of modern man" is something like the following: that consciousness has no choice but to round on and tear at itself when it comes up against problems too large for solving or even facing—the death of God; the rise of totalitarianism (or of

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technology). So Kafka (having picked up quite a few pointers from Dostoevsky) suffers representatively for us all, and represents our suffering for all time in such epics of the modern predicament as *The Trial* (the r. of t.) and *The Castle* (the d. of G.); e.g. in *The Trial*:

> Here K. was interrupted by a shriek from the end of the hall; he peered from beneath his hand to see what was happening, for the reek of the room and the dim light together made a whitish dazzle of fog. It was the washerwoman, whom K. had recognized as a potential cause of disturbance from the moment of her entrance. Whether she was at fault now or not, one could not tell. All K. could see was that a man had drawn her into a corner by the door and was clasping her in his arms. Yet it was not she who had uttered the shriek but the man; his mouth was wide open and he was gazing up at the ceiling. A little circle had formed round them, the gallery spectators near by seemed to be delighted that the seriousness which K. had introduced into the proceedings should be dispelled in this manner. . . .

—or in *The Castle*:

> ". . . Is it really Castle service Barnabas is doing, we ask ourselves then; granted, he goes into the offices, but are the offices part of the real Castle? And even if there are offices actually in the Castle, are they the offices that Barnabas is allowed to enter? He's admitted into certain rooms, but they're only a part of the whole, for there are barriers behind which there are more rooms. Not that he's actually forbidden to pass the barriers . . . [etc. ad infinitum.]"

Now the point of such unendingly reverberant circumstantiality is that it has no point at all: quite unlike the realistic detail of such comedies as *The Metamorphosis* and *The Burrow*, it's a parody whether intended or not of the pretensions of realism: nobody ever does anything and nothing ever happens and the setting is nowhere and one explanation is as good or bad as another but, but, but meaning accumulates—e.g. authority is mysterious, scary, inaccessible, maybe nonexistent; appearances can't be trusted; guilt is inherent in consciousness; individuals are at the mercy of processes, bureaucrats, delays; personal relationships are impossible, personal encounters transitory and mostly unpleasant. Page after page of sawdust, and a hope—rapidly dwindling and at last unwarranted—of coming at last to something better than a rubber bone.

What's called for from the writer here isn't invention but illustration or filler as in S.F. or detective fiction, he starts with a scheme and works it out more or less efficiently or runs it into the ground or, as in *The Trial* and *The Castle*, can never quite decide how to carry it through to an ending—though for *The Trial* Kafka wrote an abrupt and helplessly melodramatic final chapter in which while somebody watches from a window ("Who was it? . . . Was it one person only? Or was it mankind?") K. gets knifed to death: " 'Like a dog!' he said; it was as if the shame of it must outlive him." When in 1918 Brod was trying to sustain both his marriage of

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convenience and an intense affair, he wrote to Kafka for advice and consolation, and Kafka concluded his discreet, attentive, loving reply with a comment on "the vision you have, and have with such certainty—'calm, complete peace in eros' ": it "is something so tremendous that you can't really swallow it; which fact should prove how untenable it is. I'd have some belief in it only if you called it by a less fancy name. But . . . because you do give it that name, it's likely to indicate a different conflict." *The Trial* and *The Castle* are such tremendous visions that Kafka can't really swallow them; he has something different and simpler in mind, as in his diaries and letters, as in his realistic fiction about baffled animals; and it may be that he was encouraged to attempt such outsize projects by his affinity with and derivation from Dostoevsky, a much more complex, more various, and more problematical writer.

Amerika, which was Kafka's first try at a novel, is very different from the later two—he had been reading Dickens, and he set out to write a Dickens-like novel of a boy's adventures that would avoid Dickens's weaknesses: "There is a heartlessness behind his sentimentally overflowing style. These rude characterizations which are artificially stamped on everyone and without which Dickens would not be able to get on with his story even for a moment." Kafka himself, though, hasn't the range and momentum without which a novel becomes episodic or disintegrates entirely (which for instance Dickens has, and which even against the inertia of those "rude characterizations" keep his novels going). *Amerika* jolts and lurches and often seems merely odd, maybe not only because it wasn't completed but because Kafka's own rude characterizations aren't moved or motivated any more individually or independently here than they are in his later novels. Nevertheless it's the most uncharacteristic and the most inventive of Kafka's works as from the middle of Europe he recreates the Land of Promise: roaring traffic day and night (before the First World War!); an immense and mysterious "country house" outside New York anticipating Gatsby's; the adventures of a conscientious and hapless elevator operator; a political rally at which the candidate addresses the crowd while being carried about on the shoulders of a giant; the hundreds of women dressed as angels standing on pedestals and blowing long golden trumpets to recruit performers for "the Nature Theater of Oklahoma"; and fat, slothful, pampered Brunelda—

> For that must be your first consideration, Rossman. Brunelda mustn't be disturbed. Her hearing's very keen; it's probably because she's a singer that her ears are so sensitive. For instance, say that you're rolling out a keg of brandy which usually stands behind the trunks, it makes a noise because it's heavy and all sorts of things are lying about on the floor, so that you can't roll it straight out. Brunelda, let us say, is lying quietly on the couch catching flies, which are a great torment to her. You think she's paying no attention to you, and you go on rolling the keg. She's still lying there quite peacefully. But all at once, just when you're least expecting it and when you're making least noise, she suddenly sits up, bangs with both hands on the couch so that you can't

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see her for dust—since we came here I have never beaten the dust out of the couch; I really couldn't, she's always lying on it—and begins to yell ferociously, like a man, and goes on yelling for hours. The neighbors have forbidden her to sing, but no one can forbid her to yell; she has to yell; though that doesn't happen often now, for Delamarche and I have grown careful. . . .

It's Dickensian all right, and it's original too and quite like Papa and the Rabbi of Belz. A very promising first novel by a writer who takes chances and isn't afraid to be funny.

his mysterious book

has come on the scene with the timeliness, unexpectedness and inevitability of the real work of art. We should be intrigued by and grateful for its presence," says *Charles Tomlinson* of *Frederick Morgan's* THE TAROT OF CORNELIUS AGRIPPA, a collection of 22 prose poems, praised by *Bruno Bettelheim* ("I truly appreciate these parables"), *Nancy Cardozo* ("Magical . . . your book will have a long much-loved life"), *Daniel Hoffman* ("the imaginative power of the great folktales"), and *Richmond Lattimore* ("a varied and beautiful series").

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Telling Stories

Is MIDDLE-AGE MAINLY CHARACTERIZED by a growing impatience with contemporary fiction? My impatience makes itself felt in various ways: in the decision, or at least the impulse, to take a walk, play the piano, have a drink and turn on some electronic equipment, watch the Celtics or Red Sox, anything but read on to see how the tale I'm being told will turn out. As I near the end especially, there is difficulty in containing myself from flipping my eyes over the page, the pages themselves over until the blessed blank space finally appears. "Dear—oh, dear, yes—the novel tells a story" says the droopy figure E. M. Forster gave his sympathies to in *Aspects of the Novel*. I would amend this to something like, "Christ yes, alas, and aren't most stories pretty awful entertainment?" Anyway, even if few of the novels from this quarter have telling stories, the few that did reminded me of the sense in which storytelling can still be a noble occupation.

The latest book from the never-resting pen of "our greatest living man of letters" (Gore Vidal, in case you hadn't guessed) is the perfect one for that dubious activity called Summer Reading, assuming you can bear your own company during the experience.[1] Once more Vidal imagines a charming heroine and narrator, this one a tough-as-nails admirer of Amelia Earhart (her father was in love with Amelia) who becomes a terrific pilot, then has her tubes cauterized, then writes a book *Beyond Motherhood* in which she answers the "rumors that I was a dyke." Teddi Ottinger's (our heroine) answer is, of course, bisexuality "along with Joan Baez, Kate Millett, Susan Sontag and other worthies of the day." At any rate she is hired to investigate the "Kalki" phenomenon, an American living in Katmandu who heads an end-of-the-world sect, is rumored to be in cahoots with the Drug Trade, and would love to have Teddy do some piloting for him.

No need to reconstruct this surprise-a-minute plot, though since everything is calculatedly madcap I never rose to a single surprise. The best thing for it was to forget the story, disdain any interest in what might happen next, and take in Vidal's by now rather well-worn nastiness about how vulgar everybody is, like Teddy's ex-husband's mother Lenore who is said by the ex to have "the big C": " 'Actually, we don't know if it's the big C yet,' said Lenore, settling into a third martini, full of pickled onions. 'They operate at Cedars-Sinai next Tuesday. At seven A.M. on the button. Then they'll know.' " I suppose there is something for a jaded appetite here; and at moments, looking at the present state of things, Vidal sinks to a believable depression with it all—with New York City:

> We crossed Bryant Park, a small square of green behind the library. Tall bare trees surrounded a shaggy meadow. On benches sat the poor,

[1] KALKI, by *Gore Vidal*. Random House. $10.00.

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the derelict. Most were black or Hispanic. Some drank wine out of bottles wrapped in brown paper bags.

We sat for a moment on a bench next to a green bronze statue, streaked with white pigeon droppings. A pale sun tried but failed to burn its way through the brown haze. On the next bench, a white man was shoving a dirty hypodermic needle into a shiny swollen blue and red ankle. Nobody paid any attention.

But Vidal doesn't really pay any attention either, except to use this bit of awfulness as an indication that the end of the world may really be here. The razz-ma-tazz tale being told can't have any truck with human beings, or a society either. I should guess that when your true subjects are E. Howard Hunt or LaBelle Lance, it's hard to be a compelling novelist as well, since in the novel you have yourself to invent and explore kinds of behavior—and *Kalki* doesn't stand still long enough to explore anything.

Like Vidal, Dotson Rader strikes me as basically a journalist, and the interesting things in his new novel about an evangelist (he is himself the son of one) are found in its details and often vivid language ("you go through money as fast as shit through a goose").[2] The evangelist, Nathum Charity, whose slogan is "God Bless you real good," confronts such mythical figures from the American past as Aimee Semple McPherson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, to the latter of whom he tells an "Eleanor" story. As Mrs. Roosevelt is visiting a Negro shanty near Atlanta, she finds in the shanty, papered with old newspapers, a picture of herself next to one of Josephine Baker proudly displayed over the little girl's bed. Says Eleanor, " 'Why do you have them pictures pinned there above your bed? Is it because Miss Baker and me've labored so long to improve the lot of the niggers?' " Whereupon the child answers that her " 'Mammy done pinned 'em there: She say dat if I's good den when I grew up I'll look like Josephine Baker. But if I's bad, den da Debbel will make me look like dat ol' lady.' " As for the elaborate plot involving sexual doings, political chicanery, goings-on in different generations of the family, let us think of it charitably as a peg on which to hang a few good lines. I believe Mr. Rader has recently been making a study of Ruth Carter Stapleton, and I look forward to the outcome of his research, not necessarily written up into a novel.

Vidal and Rader have written books to browse in, not the most satisfactory activity for a reader of novels. I'm pretty sure Alan Lelchuk would look with some contempt on browsers of his latest and longest, but it does seem to me he's let himself in for it.[3] His hero, Lionel Solomon, novelist, professor of literature, father of grown daughter, lover of sweetly Jewish mistress, jogger and worrier, comes up against (let it be put that way) Wild Sex in the form of one Tippy Matthews, a dangerously sensual creature with, of course, wonderful breasts. Lionel eventually ends up in a rest home, as is explained to us at some length in a foreword by "Dr.

[2] MIRACLE, by *Dotson Rader*. Random House. $8.95.
[3] SHRINKING, by *Alan Lelchuk*. Little, Brown. $11.95.

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Benjamin Liric," the psychiatrist who treats him. We hear much about Lionel's earlier novels (they bear some resemblance to Alan Lelchuk's) and we are to understand that it is Lelchuk-Lionel's passion for honesty and truth that has made these books so different from the usual American novel, made up evidently of "verbal gimmickry, cerebral games, soft wit and easy art." A paragraph early along in the book forcefully states our hero's and doubtless the author's predicament, as the case for and against literature is put:

> Writing it, reading it, teaching it, believing in it had caused me more harm than I had imagined. . . . Believing in literature made me want the richer, more complex life over the simple; teaching it encouraged my sense of risk-taking and adventurousness to the point of extremity; writing it brought out to me its full sensual appeal and possibility, so much beyond the ordinary humdrum existence of everyday life. Literature was like a drug . . .

Shrinking, then, could be said to be about what happens when you confuse literature with life, when your teaching, your sex life, your life becomes adventurous to the point of extremity—you go to pieces, but with some memorable times along the way. Along that way almost everything else is included: Lionel's Brooklyn boyhood, a trip west to Arizona (presumably the novelist visited there recently?), much psychotherapeutic lore and a number of ill-advised attempts to "frame" the story—not just the foreword but also endless postscripts in which everybody tries to get in a last word. As was seen in *Miriam at Thirty-Four,* and at times in his earlier *American Mischief,* Lelchuk has a superb eye for the dailiness of things—jogging, cooking supper or shopping, moving about in a classroom. But he isn't overblessed with humor, and is also a bit of a sex snob; indeed the sex is out of Fantasy Mag and could do with a dose of laughter at its expense. This book seems to say, if you want something besides "soft and easy art" you must take everything, and here it all is from soup to nuts to whips. I wish Lelchuk would, for a breather, write a short story or two, at least something with less than "full sensuous appeal and possibility." But along with the emotional overkill in this book, there is intelligence, passion, clarity of seeing: he is nothing if not a novelist for life.

Two first novels about as different from one another as possible, both written by women of raised consciousness.[4] Susan Isaacs is sharp, sarcastic, writes short paragraphs and dialogue that anyone can follow without overly extending the mind. Here is a Long Island restaurant where young married women have lunch together:

> Quelle Crepe had opened in the early sixties, when masses of young couples, thousands of little Jacks and Jackies, moved to Long Island from Brooklyn and Queens. Refusing to adopt the suburban Eisen-

[4] COMPROMISING POSITIONS, by *Susan Isaacs.* Times Books. $8.95. BURNING QUESTIONS, by *Alix Kates Shulman.* Knopf. $8.95.

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> howeresque style of their neighbors—the crew cut, the circle pin, and the barbecue—they served coq au vin to each other . . . and the ladies—they weren't women then, marched right by the tea rooms of the Old Wave suburbanites and into Quelle Crepe, where for a few dollars you could have a glass of wine and a crepe with fromage or fromage et oeufs or fromage et oeufs et jambon or even fromage et oeufs et jambon et asperges, like a francophile's Dagwood sandwich.

Very nice what happens here to the French sandwich built for Jack and Jacky. Susan Isaacs has good eyes but also an ear for oddities, suburban horrors which fascinate her, like the abode of Mr. and Mrs. Dunck:

> The Duncks' House was in an area called Shorecrest, an enclave about a quarter of a mile square, featuring three types of houses: a split-level, something called a splanch—an unfortunate marriage of a ranch and a split-level—and a colonial model. Dicky and Brenda had opted for tradition and selected the colonial model. Their mailbox was embossed with a vicious-looking eagle clenching arrows in one talon and their address, a gilt number 14, in the other.

Sentences like these keep the novel going, rather than its plot (Who beat in the brains of the pornographic dentist? Will our heroine dump her awful husband for the attractive cop?) nor certainly its "ideas" about anything. A lively novelist who operates on her wits, located near the top of her head, Susan Isaacs just manages to bring it off.

As most surely does not the author of *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (the most disposable memoir I can remember thumbing through in the last ten years, save for Phil Jackson's account of life with the N.Y. Knicks) who pretends she is a *really* raised consciousness named Zane IndiAnna and who gives us her riches-to-rags story, from life in the 1950's Midwest, through marriage and all that jazz, to the swampy solemnities of lesbian love and the swellness of all the gals at the Third Street Circle of Revolutionary Feminists:

> "I'd always thought," I said, "that what would be different about loving a woman was the passion. But the passion is what feels the same."
>
> Faith laughed at my innocence. "Passion is passion," she said.
>
> "But there is *something* absolutely different," I persisted.
>
> "Oh, yes."
>
> "What is it? The equality? Is it starting out equal?" . . .
>
> "I myself think it's the honesty," said Faith. "Not playing the game; not using tactics."

I restrain myself from quoting the rest of this detumescent passage that, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along. But you can see that they are really having a good talk and working out lots of things. There is a finely revealing moment (though Alix Kates Shulman doesn't have the

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foggiest of what it reveals) when "Zane" says she's not going to burden us with particular details about her husband Ricky (he does have a name) because, since she's trying to show the woman's experience in relation to historic events, it can't make any difference which husband or marriage or grievance you've got: "The particular husband is beside the point." Clearly the complexities of writing a novel are equally beside the point for Ms. Shulman. The funny thing is that since its revolutionary devotedness, like its sex, is all in the head—not "in" the novel, the way it must be to count—Shulman ends up writing something like Advanced Ladies Fiction for the 1970's. Put this book next to a Harlequin Romance, then compare and marvel at their respective one-mind worlds. But if you plan, for some reason, to read it, be warned that it ends with a . . . bibliography!

There is nothing of the extreme or simple-minded about Gail Godwin, and one would expect from the author of *The Odd Woman* careful and leisurely portraiture, balanced attitudes towards the sexes and experience generally, as well as much sincerity and an absence of humor. The new novel seems to me to have something seriously wrong with it, not so much for what it includes as for what it lacks.[5] What's askew in its tone may be gathered from the concluding sentences, informing us that "Meanwhile that limitless radiance which eludes us all spins on, taking our day with it, teasing and turning us for a time in its vibrant dimensions, continuing to spread its blind effulgence when we have gone." I realize that a Fitzgerald or a Faulkner manage not to sink under such diction, but Gail Godwin's quite straightforward manner of telling Violet Clay's story (a flashback here, another one there, now back to the present again), plus the rather claustrophobic nature of her "I" narrative, introduces an embarrassing lyricism that you wish somebody, if not the author, could be critical and ironic about: "The color of Ivor's body was a surprise too; it was a warm russet color, like a winter apple. I had expected it to be white and withdrawn, like his face. And my dream had been prescient: he was warm. He was magnanimously warm, and as firm and as sure of my response as if he'd been my appointed fate." Somehow I felt as if I were watching a sadly romantic, "serious" TV or movie bit. And though *Violet Clay* introduces many characters, moves the heroine around here and there, I couldn't see what interesting purposes were being served other than getting a novel written. Page by page it simply was not entertaining.

Three unordinary volumes of short fiction to take note of:[6] the first of what will be Paul Goodman's *Collected Stories* is handsomely printed and intelligently edited by Goodman's biographer, Taylor Stoehr. I remember years ago reading and feeling bewildered by but somehow attracted to *The Break-Up of Our Camp* in one of those little New Directions books which breathed *avant-garde*. The present volume also contains a group of earlier stories (the "Johnson" stories) about Goodman's erotic longings, and

[5] VIOLET CLAY, by *Gail Godwin*. Knopf. $10.00.

[6] THE BREAK-UP OF OUR CAMP: Stories 1932–1935, by *Paul Goodman*. Black Sparrow Press. $14.00; $5.00 paperback. AIRSHIPS, by *Barry Hannah*. Knopf. $8.95. ADULTERY & OTHER CHOICES, by *Andre Dubus*. David R. Godine. $8.95.

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these are interesting not for what develops in them but for their moments of meditative and topographical poetry. Johnson, waking in the evening, nods to clouds, spring, the music of Haydn, beautiful dogs, and aspires to see the world full of meaningful objects, since "to every object that we clearly understand in itself, he felt, we owe a measure of love and, therefore, respect." Like Wallace Stevens as a young man in New York City, Johnson-Goodman is drawn to the Palisades; but (unlike Stevens) the Hudson River speaks to him, and he pledges to love this river more than any other, throughout his life. Later, in pursuit of his beloved male friend, he journeys west and meets the Delaware River:

> . . . not where it is sweeping broadly into the sea, but near its source, at Water Gap, where it is first breaking loose from the barrier of the mountains and is becoming a river at all. The direction of its flow has not yet been determined at this point; no tons of water have ploughed a course down into the rock. But it slowly goes with great windings, often turning almost back on itself, creating knobby peninsulas, and sometimes making wooded islands which it quite surrounds with its pliable arms—wherever there is a way.

And Johnson decides that unlike the Lordly Hudson, a Protestant river, this river with "so French, so Catholic a name" . . . is "like love."

Goodman's stories are unsettling to read because they strike attitudes one often can't decide whether to take seriously or to treat as bathetic examples of the art of sinking in prose. I felt this particularly in rereading *The Break-Up of Our Camp* sequence of related stories, which as Mr. Stoehr rightly says are about "last things" but which live through the brilliant invention of a summer camp's last days, the mysterious appearance of the mythical "canoeist," the dreamlike chaos of who will get home how,when one will leave, how long after camp is officially over one should hang around. The narrator, a dramatics counselor, has suddenly—too late—discovered the charms of a young boy named Julie Bayer, who has just left on a truck with the Montreal contingent:

> I grew slowly into a cold fury: that all summer I have never known Julie Bayer and his pals (to be sure I had known them all summer; Julie had acted in the first show of the season). That never had we acted out the legend of Armand and his canoe. That they were taking away from me forever my beautiful stage and my actors with their ringing throats. That my time of life was slipping away, it was slipped away. And what was the use of this desert camp-site?

If you find such a passage something other than embarrassing—though embarrassment is one of the readerly feelings Goodman exploits—you will find these stories worth a lookover.

The chorus of praise for Barry Hannah's collection has been something to listen to: on the dust jacket we face combined testimony by Cynthia Ozick, Philip Roth, Denis Donoghue, James Dickey, Tony Tanner, and, if that weren't enough, old Mr. Big Two-Hearted Alfred Kazin, who is not

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so exclusively a New York Jew that he can't respond to non-New York art: "Strong, original, tragic, and funny . . . a writer of violent honesty and power in the creative Southern tradition." Perhaps Kazin found it tragic indeed (and of course funny too) when in "Coming Close to Donna" (a nymphomaniac, and a heroin addict for good measure) the narrator, high on cocaine, crushes in her head with a tombstone. She had begged to be "screwed," as the phrase is, and so the story ends with the terrific punchline, "I gave it to her." Was Prof. Kazin deeply moved or did he laugh aloud when in "Deaf and Dumb," some boys kill a king snake with a hammer, wrap it around the hammer, and (their father having fallen down the basement stairs) the youngest boy hits his mother in the mouth with the hammer, waking up the half-dead snake. I couldn't myself decide whether that was funny or tragic, but it's certainly in the Creative Southern Tradition, as is a lovely one called "Eating Wife and Friends" in which Mrs. Neap barbecues an Oriental (because "they're so clean"), slathers on tomato sauce with pepper and feeds it to her boarders.

It's all words, right? Just tall tales, yes? "I kicked him in the stomach. When he passed out, he was still crooning." The promiscuous use of "I" seems to me perhaps Hannah's worst trait as a writer; but generally I felt in slobbish company, everybody eating rice with ketchup or shaving their idiot twin sister. If this is the New South give me the Old North. And if the praise of Hannah had been confined to one long story, "Testimony of Pilot," with a wonderful scene involving a high school band, I would willingly salute him. But that tale's impact is nearly ruined by the gratuitous far-out violence of the others which, as far as I can see, Hannah just enjoys. I leave it to him, and leave him to Kazin.

And as my favorite writer of short fiction choose Andre Dubus, whose name is not yet a household word. David R. Godine has handsomely published his second collection of work, with a striking cover (rumpled sheets and pillows on a double bed which may have recently been used for something besides sleeping) and without a single blurb hailing him as America's finest. Yet Dubus seems to me as good a realist writer as we have. His subjects are marriage, adultery, parents and children, drinking, being overweight or insomniac—and other choices. His tone is post-Hemingway cool, unrhetorical, though capable of poetically exalted moments of contemplation. The stories are very much in our time, and though his men tend to be writers and teachers and his women housewives and mothers, both men and women have lost the ability to believe deeply in right and wrong, or to distinguish between the permitted and the forbidden. In a fine earlier story "Separate Flights" (the title of his previous collection) an almost-fifty year old wife and her husband are driving back to Iowa from Massachusetts where they have taken their daughter to college. The wife, fallen out of love with her husband, unable to sleep at night, drinking too much too often, has been haunted by an adulterous liaison she never consummated, and in finally talking about it she gets her husband to admit that he has had "other women":

> "Really? I thought so."
> Her voice sounded strange in her throat. Then she was looking out

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the window at trees that were darker than the sky and she was crying and she could not stop.

"—*understand,*"—he was saying. "You *wanted* me to say it, so what is it now?"

She was shaking her head, her hands covering her face.

Because it does matter and it doesn't matter and it does matter. "Because I hate you and I hate me. And that's not true either, there's nothing true—"

Eventually she pretends to fall asleep, as they continue the trip home.

The other major story in the previous collection (a novella actually) was "We Don't Live Here Anymore," about the fortunes of two couples whose partners are sexually involved with their opposite mates. In the new collection the main story, "Adultery," continues to deal with these characters, but now seeing the situation through the eyes of another of its participants. Edith finds out her husband is having an affair, and in the ensuing talk also finds that he doesn't believe in monogamy and doesn't expect her to believe in it. Dubus is marvelous at building, from phrase to phrase, the shock registered by a mind opening on new vistas:

> All day she knew what madness was, or she believed she was at least tasting it and at times she yearned for the entire feast. While she did her work and made lunch for Sharon and talked to her and put her to bed with a coloring book and tried to read the newspaper and then a magazine, she could not stop the voices in her mind: some of it repeated from last night, some drawn up from what she believed she had heard and spoken in her sleep, some in anticipation of tonight, living tonight before it was there, so that at two in the afternoon she was already at midnight and time was nothing but how much pain she could feel at once.

This seems to me distinguished writing, and typical of Dubus' work. The collection also includes some good stories about life in the Armed Services and a superb one ("Andromache") about the wife of a Marine. From my undeniably male vantage point, I would say that he writes about married women—and men too—with great acuity and sympathy. But I hope enough has been said to commend this not-nearly-read-enough artist.

The English writer Frederic Manning has nothing in common with Andre Dubus except the ability to write lucidly unadorned sentences, and on occasion rise to a higher utterance—the "poetic dimension." Manning's admirable novel about the Great War was first published in a limited edition in 1929, then expurgated (the soldiers' language toned down) and appeared under the title *Her Privates We*.[7] It is a book which takes attentive persistence to read through, and the experience is worth it, especially as—in the late chapters—the men prepare to go over the top, very likely to meet their deaths. The hero, Bourne, is more sensitive and

[7] THE MIDDLE PARTS OF FORTUNE, by *Frederic Manning*. St. Martins Press. $8.95.

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articulate, more detached and lonely than his compatriots, and Manning is able to speak through Bourne in a high melancholy prose that is both attractive and moving, as here the men fall in on the road and move to the trench:

> Then came the voices of the company commanders, one after the other, and the quick stamping as the men obeyed, the rustle as they turned; and their own turn came, the quick stamps, the swing half-right, and then something like a rippling murmur of movement, and the slurred rhythm of their trampling feet, seeming to beat out the seconds of time, while the liquid mud sucked and sucked at their boots, and they dropped into that swinging stride without speaking; and the houses of Bus slid away on either side, and the mist wavered and trembled about them in little eddies, and earth, and life, and time, were as if they had never been.

This is very much an aural experience—we are listening to a compelling, artful voice. But a few moments later a different voice is heard as somebody yells "For Christ's sake walk on your own fuckin' feet an' not on mine!"—Manning's prose keeps us beautifully in touch with the way things are. With its Shakespearean epigraphs for each chapter, precisely and tellingly deployed, the book deserves to be mentioned in at least the same breath with *Henry IV* and *V*. Humor, irony, sadness, noble aspiring, mingle with and complement each other; and though it is not a great story (the chapters feel a bit like static blocks, after dealing with each of which one begins again) it does have cumulative force, and one does not emerge from it untouched. Hemingway's remark about it being "the finest and noblest book of men in war that I have ever read" sounds like no more than the truth.

"Three printings sold out before publication," cried an early ad for Mary Gordon's first novel; more recently it has been pushed as the "surprise bestseller of the year."[8] I hope it takes nothing away from her exceptional talents if I suggest that perhaps Random House isn't as surprised as they pretend, and that much powerful and smoothly-operated publicity has done its bit to insure the book sells. Still, somebody at Random House was clever enough to imagine this might happen—that her presence as a novelist is hard to resist, and that it appeals to quite different sorts of readers. I say this on the basis of having spoken to some of those readers, of different sex, age and convictions, all of whom liked the book. Unlike the case with respect to, say, Doris Lessing, Mary McCarthy, or even Margaret Drabble, no one seems to be put off or offended or bored by Mary Gordon.

The story, probably familiar to readers by this time, is of how Isabel Moore faces life, after caring for her stroke-ridden father for eleven years. Thirty years old as she emerges from his death, she rediscovers the

[8] FINAL PAYMENTS, by *Mary Gordon*. Random House. $8.95.

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sensuous world of food, clothes, sex, and their attendant, often guilty aftertastes. Reawakened friendships with her two best friends, one bad and one good affair with men, a crisis, a retreat, a hopeful return at the book's end. All this is described by the first-person narrator, and I remember that the author has been quoted as saying that Elizabeth Hardwick, with whom she studied writing at Barnard, had advised her that first, rather than third, person was the right form for *Final Payments*. True enough; a central reason for the novel's charm and a measure of its limits.

Hear this speaker on the novel's first page, describing the priests who attended her father's funeral:

> They prided themselves on being out of the ordinary. . . . One of their jokes was that non-Catholics thought that they argued about how many angels could dance on the head of a pin, not knowing that this was a ridiculous question: angels were pure spirits; they did not dance. No, it was the important questions that absorbed them. They argued about baptism of desire, knocking dishes of pickles onto the carpet in their ardor. They determined the precise nature of the Transubstantiation, fumbling for my name as I freshened their drinks.

Beyond the precision of syntax and the strongly-felt rhythmic pace, the passage lives in its juxtaposing, without raising an eyebrow, the baptism of desire with pickles on a carpet, or the dead, middle-class word "freshened" with argument about Transubstantiation. The narrator is very secure here, has ordered her past experience into revealing comic and ironic formulations; and the novel is strong, dignified and funny too, when it is thus reflective.

When by contrast Isabel is living in the present, and turns her mind to people and subjects other than her father, priests, life in the old Queens apartment, Mary Gordon sometimes has a problem. She's fine when dealing with the old people on welfare whom Isabel goes around to interview; they can be presented as grotesquely or humorously or sadly affecting, can be characterized with the sharpness of one-dimensional life—as Jane Austen and Dickens were good at doing. But with her two girl-friends (and I use the word deliberately, since there is a lovely spirit of high school-best pals affection that hangs over them) and with Bad John (the man who, in an admired line, handles her breast "as if he had been making a meatball"—there is a lot about breasts in this novel) or Good Hugh of the "beautiful, classical back," she sometimes seems to be flailing the narrative along:

> I called Liz. Why had we stayed away from one another? When we lived a hundred miles apart we were closer; we had had telephone calls that were like works of art, full of color and definite line. They had helped me. I wanted to tell Liz now, more than she could possibly know. I had been trying to remember what my life had been like, how I had got through it. Hugh had been helping me; it was terribly important, he said, that I remember.

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Nothing wrong with this, but maybe not quite enough right with it; compared to the prose standards she sets elsewhere these sentences are not fully enough written, the characters not quite there.

But the novel is strong at its end, as Mary Gordon manages to prevent this Jane Eyre from going out into the world and reducing it to the dimensions of her own mind. Again, humor is terribly important in keeping things sane, as on the last page when Isabel, returned from her term of penance at the abominable Catholic, Margaret Casey's, confronts her friends who have come to take her away from it all and presumably back to life. While staying at Margaret's, the heroine has gotten fat, sloppy, and had her hair done into a Bubble Cut, most chastening of former styles and beyond almost anyone's nostalgia:

> Liz looked at me, her eyes flicking up and down in quick judgment. "Who did your hair? Annette Funicello?"
>
> The three of us laughed. It was a miracle to me, the solidity of that joke. Even the cutting edge of it was a miracle.

The cutting edge of this novel is similarly solid, and like all really solid things—like laughter—miraculous. There will be more, and more difficult books, to come from Mary Gordon, for which and for whom we should be pleased.

Paul Theroux is simply a wonder, and this his eighth novel a remarkable piece of work.[9] In reviewing his last one, *The Family Arsenal,* two years ago I spoke of how it (and its very fine predecessor, *The Black House*) each featured a desperate man endowed with great sensitivity, irony, and visionary or novelistic powers of forecast and apprehension. I also noted that both novels were consistently entertaining—I had not been so entertained since discovering Anthony Burgess in the middle 1960's. *Picture Palace* is even bolder and more daring than the last two, partly because its narrator (a first-person narrative Theroux hasn't used since *Saint Jack*) is a tough seventy-year-old photographer named Maude Coffin Pratt who is both desperately wrong about things—as we see from the tale of her life she unfolds, and which provides the course of the novel—and righter about them than anybody else can be, the way artists are "right" about things. In other words, Theroux has worked the metaphor of "visionary powers"—all those nineteenth-century heroines who saw so much—into a shutter-snapping wise-cracking ugly duckling of a narrator whose (hopeless?) passion for her brother Orlando is the determining fact of her life, and the reason she becomes a photographer in the first place. The book undertakes a very complicated and satisfyingly dialectical exploration of blindness, sight, insight, vision and revision—which exploration is the equivalent to the moral and political argument of *The Family Arsenal,* or the anthropological and mystical one of *The Black House.*

An exploration, but not an argument, for one never feels after reading Theroux that one has learned something about the Nature of . . . of whatever. An even better word for it is "entertainment," and some of the

[9] PICTURE PALACE, by *Paul Theroux*. Houghton Mifflin. $9.95.

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most entertaining things about *Picture Palace* are the set-pieces in which Maude encounters famous modern artists—like D. H. Lawrence or T. S. Eliot or Frost or Raymond Chandler—and "does them" (play is made with the sexual force of this expression) into art, storing them in an old windmill on Cape Cod, but more truly in the picture palace of her mind put on display by this novel. (That song "The Windmills of your Mind" may also be kicking around someplace.) The first and best of these portraits is of Graham Greene, whom Maude at 70 goes to London to shoot for her final picture, but who reminds her of brother Orlando and who, after drinks at the Ritz and dinner at Bentley's, so moves her that she ends up not taking his picture after all. The description is masterful:

> Greene's face, made handsome by fatigue, had a sagging summer redness. He could have passed for a clergyman—he had that same assured carriage, the bored pitying lips, the gentle look of someone who has just stopped praying. And yet there was about his look of piety an aspect of raffishness; about his distinguished bearing an air of anonymity; and whether it was caution or breeding, a slight unease in his hands. Like someone out of uniform, I thought, a general without his medals, a bishop who's left his robes upstairs, a happy man not quite succeeding at a scowling disguise. His hair was white, suggesting baldness at a distance, and while none of his features was remarkable, together they created an extraordinary effect of unshakable dignity, the courtly ferocity you see in very old lions.

With prose like that Theroux convinces us that words are worth a thousand pictures.

The Family Arsenal was chock-full of London cockney tough-talk; *Picture Palace* is equally idiomatically alive, page by page, as Maude satirizes the new photographers with their highest priced equipment:

> These faddists of high contrast and golf-ball grain could shoot fly spit, the smell of an onion, sunspots, a virus picking its nose, bazooka shells bursting out of gun muzzles, indigestion, a fart in a mitten.

Or a new Japanese camera "so small you could swallow it at noon and photograph your breakfast." Or Arbus-inspired girl photographers who tell Maude that they're "into freaks, because it represents how I feel as a woman" and whom she (and surely Theroux) see as "like amateur assassins whose parents gave them a gun for Christmas: they brought me their victims." *Picture Palace* shares with Susan Sontag's recent *On Photography*, many moral and cultural reservations (to put it mildly) about taking pictures, but Theroux feels rather more inwards with the activity than does Sontag, and he is a lot more fun, as when Maude makes a scornful list of photographic clichés:

> Abandoned Playground, Rainy Street, Lady in Funny Hat, Torso with Tits, Shoeshine Boy, Honest Face, Drunken Bum, Prostitute in Slit

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> Skirt Standing near *Rooms* Sign, Mr. and Mrs. Front Porch America . . . Haggard Peckerwoods, Every Hair of a Bush Beard, Spoiled Brat, Good-Humor Ice Cream Man, Country Road Leading to Bright Future, Muddy Field in Europe . . . Obviously Unemployed Man in his Undershirt, Dog Lover, Wrinkled Eskimo, Mother and Child, Jazzman with Shiny Instrument . . .

"You could see more exciting things . . . by sticking your head out the window," Maude snorts.

It's true that incest is the most heavily-used of literary themes, but it seems to me no more damaging here, with its theatrical heightening of experience, than in Faulkner or Ivy Compton-Burnett. It's all just a story, dazzlingly and intensely told, with the great modern fictional classics—James and Conrad and Ford and Faulkner, and Graham Greene too—giving Theroux ballast for the idea that the telling is enough. I think it is, because he never lets up, never writes a paragraph of filler or "transition" which has less than his full presence as a writer behind it. *Picture Palace* is another impressive testimony that as a steadily producing writer of long and short fiction, travel books, essays and reviews—of "letters" generally—no American writer matters more than this gifted and possessed word-man.

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DEAN FLOWER

Fiction Moralized

HIGH SERIOUSNESS WAS WHAT MATTHEW ARNOLD CALLED IT in 1880. He struck his tuning fork (tactfully) on Homer and Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. Then he listened to Chaucer: nothing here for Victorian solemnity to rest upon, no deep "criticism of life," no high seriousness. He listened to Dryden and Burns: close, but not quite. Hesitating before Wordsworth and Byron, near contemporaries, he backed off. The future of poetry was immense, replacing God and the angels. Best not spoil the classic detachment with too much contemporary noise. *In la sua volontade è nostra pace.* Simple, genteel, and rather badly mistaken as Arnold may seem to us now, he got some important things right. Measure the present against the highest possible standards. Expect nothing less of an artist than the highest moral truth. And let your ear make the final test of greatness.

John Gardner has recently put himself in much the same position with his book of complaints about contemporary fiction.[1] His quest is for moral affirmation, eternal verity, exemplary action. Modern art, he tells us, has lost its high seriousness. He means to be old-fashioned enough to argue for it. He finds touchstones in Homer, Dante, and Tolstoy, and in his private notebook where he has been jotting down wisdom over the years from the likes of Aristotle, Schiller, and John Fowles. These treasured bits, no less than Arnold's, are fragments shored against his ruins. He has an idea that, "by specific technical means now commonly forgotten," the morality of art can be restored. Not so diffident or tactful as Arnold, he holds these touchstones up to writers and artists of the present. Not so genteel as Arnold, he tries to swing Thor's hammer, to "holler" and "bang the table," to bring some lightning to our darkling plain. Like Arnold, he believes that art may succeed, where religion and politics have failed, in finding "a vision of how things ought to be," creating myths a society can live by, legislating the world. For novelist and teacher Gardner, the future of fiction is immense, as poetry was for poet and educationist Arnold.

Now Gardner's propositions have their appeal. Whenever a modish contemporary work is measured against the best that is known and thought in the world, the effect can be bracing. Gardner is right. Much of our fiction has grown trivial, obsessed with its own texture, vitiated by its sophistications—irony and arty self-consciousness. Hence the narrowness of Gass, Coover, Barthelme, Sukenick, Barth. Much of our fiction too, Gardner argues persuasively, collapses from the sheer dishonesty of its structure, false to experience but true to its author's egotistical will. Hence our boredom with so much in Doctorow, Heller, Vonnegut, Mailer, Pynchon, even (though he gets higher marks) Bellow. One of Gardner's prime targets, never cited directly, is John Barth's 1968 essay, "The

[1] ON MORAL FICTION, by *John Gardner*. Basic Books. $8.95.

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Literature of Exhaustion." At that time Barth liked the idea that fiction, top-heavy with knowledge of its own antecedents, could only repeat and parody itself, as exemplified in Borges' "Pierre Menard and the Quixote." Barth's view has long been, like that of one of his characters, a "cheerful nihilism." Gardner's counter-argument is that we have stared too long at dead walls and into abysses, our nihilism has become a reflex, our cynicism habitual. He insists that writers are responsible for defending the Good, that the Good is discernible—in practical human terms—here and now, that our usual moral relativism or "pluralism" has become only an evasion, that humanity can still be "grandiosely conceived." However that may be, I think Gardner is right to question our automatic, post-Existential sympathy for negation, and right to question our possibly neurotic enthusiasm for the life-hate and perversity in such artists as Plath, Genet, Coover, Arbus. Gardner reminds us that we still turn to fiction with the naive desire of experiencing another's consciousness, that we still seek in it a clarification of our own struggles, and that fiction can still be uniquely effective in expressing otherwise ineffable truths. Like the character in Faulkner who was "simple enough to believe that horror and outrage were simply horror and outrage, and courageous enough to act upon that," Gardner has had enough of post-modern exhaustion. He wants a fiction of moral energy.

Appealing too are some of Gardner's arguments against fiction as a subjective verbal game. He argues that writers are not free to invent whatever "reality" they like, however fashionable this theory may seem; they have a responsibility to certain truths of human experience: "the mind does not impose structures on reality (as existentialists claim) arbitrarily maintaining now this now that—but rather . . . discovers, in discovering itself, the world." So Gardner urges, like Emerson, that reality is a discipline. He likes the radical connection of words like *true* and *tree* (both *trēow* in Old English). I am reminded in this of Nabokov's discovery as described in *Speak, Memory* of the processes of the artist—rhyme and mimicry—already richly at work in nature. Similarly Gardner argues the superiority of some metaphors over others; he notes the kind of justness or "truth" that the best writers discover when language and experience miraculously harmonize. Assuming that a writer's business has something to do with telling the truth, Gardner sensibly emphasizes the value of accuracy over improvisation. His book contains a good deal more shoptalk of this sort. None of it is strikingly original, but it has the fervor of a manifesto, and it could serve as a healthy corrective to the aimless sophistication and self-indulgence of some current fiction, although not as much as Gardner would have us believe.

One problem is that his literary judgments aren't very persuasive. He dismisses Mailer without any attempt to understand his moral explorations in such works as *Why Are We in Viet Nam?*, *An American Dream*, or *Advertisements for Myself*. He dismisses Pynchon as a propagandist. He elevates Buechner above Updike, an intelligible preference at least, then dismisses Buechner because his "religious" plots are foregone conclusions. Updike becomes the author of *A Month of Sundays*, never mind his

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career-long search for "life with a blessing" or his ideal of verbal accuracy. Gardner detects none of the moral energy behind Barthelme's satire, dismissing his flashy "textural" effects. He seems unable to understand Stanley Elkin's genius at all, and decides he's a propagandist. He thinks Bellow has "a gift for finding powerful symbols" (could anyone name a writer less interested in symbols than Bellow?). He categorizes Lawrence as a neurotic obsessed with the same subject, unable to develop. He thinks the "symbols" in *Dubliners* "stand out like wounds" from the text. He includes Dostoevsky, Poe, Lawrence, and Faulkner in a list of "important but clumsy artists." On the other hand he has nothing but admiration for William Gaddis, whom he credits for the wisdom, "believing and shitting are two different things." More intelligibly, Gardner's praise also goes out to such traditional moralists as Grace Paley, Bernard Malamud, J. D. Salinger, John Cheever, and the Eudora Welty of *Losing Battles*. And he singles out for special honor the names of Larry Woiwode, Charles Johnson, Guy Davenport, and Mark Halpern [*sic*]. What are we to think except that Gardner feels more secure praising minor talents? And what are we to think of his moral theory if he admires the war-mongering "affirmations" of Helprin's *Refiner's Fire*?

But let these mind-boggling problems pass. Perhaps a novelist's manifesto isn't debatable. The deeper problem lies in the nature of the "affirmations" that Gardner envisions. He carefully rules out artistic propaganda from the realm of moral fiction, rightly rejects didacticism, and usefully distinguishes the merely agreeable. Yet at the same time he longs to have the abiding verities—courage, honor, loyalty, fidelity, love—embodied in characters we can admire. For the question "What are we to do?" Gardner wants a writer who can *say*. He's not so simple as to argue, in the beginning at least, that the morality of fiction depends on the presence of exemplary models. He uses Aristotle effectively here to define his point: "it's the *energeia*—the actualization of the potential which exists in character and situation—that gives us the poet's fix on good and evil; that is, dramatically demonstrates the moral laws, and the possibility of tragic waste, in the universe." Gardner must therefore admit that art may instruct by negative example, although he often seems unwilling to do so. The *energeia* of *Macbeth* he can grant easily; so too the moral logic of *The Confidence Man*; but modern works make him more suspicious. One doubts that he is equipped to appreciate the moral intensity of *The Waste Land* or *Sanctuary* or *A Handful of Dust* or *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*. He's looking too hard for yea-sayings, "lofty ideals," antidotes to Sartrean "life-hate." His terms repeatedly expose the simplicity of this desire. Writers should "hold up models of decent behavior." Fiction should be a celebration of "humanity grandiosely conceived." Gardner is very much afraid that negative examples, like violence on television, do harm. Didn't Marlon Brando teach an entire generation to slump and mumble? Didn't Roy Rogers teach twelve-year-olds to squint? But these are odd arguments indeed. Moral fiction needn't be concerned with either the mass media or twelve-year-olds, nor does it really have anything to do with advice and instruction, although Gardner persists in thinking in such terms: "the

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resolution never to behave like Macbeth does not inevitably carry any clear implication of what to do instead." How to behave, what to do: how quickly Gardner forgets his Aristotelian *energeia*. He asks why our writers "find no pleasure in what happy human beings have found good for centuries (children and dogs, God, peace, wealth, comfort, love, hope, and faith)" and why readers are no longer permitted to "weep for little Nell or shudder at the effrontery of Captain Ahab." One might as well ask why the world has changed so much since Tolstoy, or why the past always seems so much nobler than the present, or why one man's lofty affirmation is another man's sentimental poison.

What Gardner misses most in contemporary fiction is belief. He would like the writer to be a mythmaker, a Shelleyan hierophant, one who envisions the Good, the Beautiful, and the True. But he is quite powerless to define a convincing model, a writer neither heavily didactic nor sentimental nor propagandistic. He still thinks that the highest purpose of art is to "make people good by choice."

But let these hopelessly prescriptive formulas pass. Assume for the moment that a Tolstoyan idealism could, if writers went back to it, lead us all out of the wilderness. There's a deeper problem still in the very conception of this book: it begs the question. *Is* our serious art so morally bereft as Gardner says it is? The point is at the very least arguable and would require some detailed objective evaluation of individual works, not the dismissive labelling Gardner offers. He prefers instead to ask, why is it that "nearly everything that passes for art is tinny and commerical and often in addition hollow and academic"? And why is "most art these days either trivial or false"? And why do we put up with "debauched" art just as we put up with "our fast foods, our overpriced cars, . . . our brainless fat religions, our poisonous air, our incredible cult of sports" and so forth? The answers to these "questions" are in fact easy. Shoddy or "debauched" art—unlike a shoddy car or polluted atmosphere—can easily be ignored and defeated; it need not even be considered art at all by the serious critic. What is left, what Gardner himself decides is the serious art of the last two decades, is by definition (if for no other reason) neither trivial nor false nor hollow. We have only to add up Gardner's exceptions and plaudits to expose his contradiction: Gaddis, Fowles, Malamud, Cheever, Bellow, Buechner, some Updike, some Welty, and nine other miscellaneous "plugs." Rather a long list for someone who claims to be a Diogenes, looking for an honest book.

What's objectionable about Gardner's question-begging is not so much its distortion of fact as its righteous tone. He likes the sound of good old-fashioned morals—the idea of admirable heroes, the notion of "banging the table" to defend art's traditional moral function. He likes the idea of driving out the "gang of absurdists and jubilant-nihilists" from their entrenched positions. He likes saying that artists should be sane and balanced, not the neurotic eccentrics and criminals that the stolid public often assumes them to be. "Real art," Gardner intones like a congressman, "creates myths a society can live instead of die by, and clearly our society is in need of such myths." Such arguments appeal to the average,

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not the informed, reader. They encourage a moralistic suspicion of truly innovative, disconcerting writers. They invite the hopeless sort of criticism you hear from certain admirers of Trollope and Dickens: "Now why can't modern novelists write like *that* any more?"

Judged by his own standard, that true art "does not rant," Gardner's book cannot be called true art. That's disappointing when it comes from a prolific novelist of some stature in this decade. His prose rants, repeats, becomes quickly predictable, goes flat, lacks form. Segments of the book appeared earlier, in these pages and elsewhere, and worked better I think as sheer opinionated hypothesis. In whatever genre Gardner has a folksy informality that jars with his Olympian pronouncements. True art, he says, "strikes like lightning, or *is* lightning; whichever." *Whichever?* Doesn't it matter? For one who so admires just metaphor, Gardner is singularly uncritical of cliches. "Like lightning" is good, by Polonius! So is a message "as old as the hills," a writer who "zero[es] in on truth," or one "who can see in the country of the blind." Why are his own fresh metaphors so uninspired? He describes the writer's raw material as "a simmering mess of loves and hates." He likens art to "a tragicomic holding action against entropy." Or it is "the hammer that tries to keep the trolls in their place." Trivial criticism is "fiddling with the hairs on an elephant's nose [*sic*] . . . when the elephant happens to be standing on the baby." Gardner sounds embarrassed by his own critical pose. He alternates donnish language ("I need not dilate on so obvious a point. Let me hurry on") and Agnewisms ("sequeacious minds," "Laodicean habits") with the gruff crudities of a bull session. Consider for example this paraphrase of Stevens' well-known lines in "Peter Quince at the Clavier" ("Beauty is momentary in the mind,/The fitful tracing of a portal,/But in the flesh it is immortal."). Gardner explains, "God still exists, in other words, but we've swallowed him." In short, Gardner's kind of shirtsleeve seriousness issues from a strident anti-intellectualism. He classifies himself with "artists and other honest laborers," while critics become overspecialized gentry who dabble in "large words like *hermaneutic, heuristic, structuralism, formalism,* or *opaque language,*" or who invent unnecessary phrases like "unmediated vision" (Geoffrey Hartman) or "interpretive choice" (Stanley Fish). Honest laborer that he is, or claims to be, Gardner has left his text riddled with errors like "J. P. Dunleavy," "Mark Halpern," and "Ferrigut" from Cheever's novel *Falcon.* He also supplies a quaint index ("Tic, neurotic, 199"; "Doubts, 49") composed on some Kinbotish scheme of unpredictable exclusion. How very odd it is to read a book about mediocre art which is itself casually and unscrupulously written.

Assuredly Gardner gets some important things right. He measures his contemporaries against the highest possible standards, expects nothing less of them than the highest moral truth, and trusts his ear (understanding, heart) in making the final judgments. Following Matthew Arnold, he believes that "all true works of art can exert their civilizing influence century after century, long after the cultures that produced them have decayed." Neither his sensibility nor his understanding is so fine as

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Arnold's, but he strives to define an equally high seriousness. If he fails, part of the reason is that 1978 is not 1880. No amount of exhortation about the "permanently moral" will bring back a Tolstoyan mode of truth-seeking. But the main reason Gardner fails is that he forgot what Arnold did. Arnold found in those touchstones of greatness in art "a criticism of life." Gardner seeks in them the justifications of his own moralism.

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Poems by Ghalib

Twenty *ghazals*

translated by AIJAZ AHMAD

in collaboration with

WILLIAM STAFFORD and ADRIENNE RICH.

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SAMUEL HAZO

The Experience of the Idea

MORE THAN TWO DECADES AGO the late Jacques Maritain wrote that the most persistent choices in life are not necessarily between the good and the bad but between the good and the better. As the author of this brief chronicle and assuming that the laws of life are transferable to literature and vice-versa, I think that Maritain's principle could apply to the books I've chosen for inclusion. Commenting on the manifestly bad or the merely trendy is really the business of the professional reviewer while distinguishing between the good and the better does involve one in the more rewarding discriminations of literary criticism—at least as much literary criticism as a poetry chronicle can accommodate. But the latter is the much more rewarding role for any writer, provided that he establishes his criteria in advance. My criteria for the books of poems in this culling (with two reservations) are that good poems are those in which the component parts work to create a whole, and better poems are those in which what is at work in the poem itself—the vision or the sensibility or the tone—has a reverberation that promises to endure beyond the mere time and place of the poem's creation.

Of Diane Ackerman's *Wife of Light*[1] I can say at the outset that I am impressed. Her best poems keep bursting the prescribed limits of the pages on which they are printed in the same way that great paintings burst their frames. What contains them? Nothing but the zest of their own inspirational energy, and Ackerman has energy. She also has wit, courage and—this is a rarity—passion, as in this excerpt from "Quixote":

> This night more sequined than a jaguar's hide
> the moon is luminous, a white fleshy scar.
> Time is a kneeling animal. People chide
> me for being short of sense, but *they* are
> short of wonder. Inbred. Inert. In cahoots. In lieu.
> They spend their lives like dull brass coins,
> while I crack open a world or two:
> life's torpor is the blazing savanna of my loins.

When Ackerman assumes a persona, she is cagey enough to choose someone she regards as a spiritual counterpart, as in her singling out George Sand (". . . that you once ploughed furrows/straight as statutes,/ once, with your pack of hunting dogs,/ran deep into far sloughly fields/to snare game,/once hooted fashion,/once tupped and raved,/once cheered, fueled, dabbled, quaffed,/tracked down, bled, bouqueted, and wallowed/ in ideas,/covering their waterfront/like a sailor's whore, who,/sleeping with all, belonged to none.") or Anne Donne ("Come away from the

[1] WIFE OF LIGHT, by *Diane Ackerman*. William Morrow. $6.95.

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window!/You get ideas like other men catch cold./Mid-morning, a trifle waylaid you again,/and now your eyes, like twin hyenas,/pick dinner in the slivery [*sic*] light/from the moon. Enough of your lyric flight!/Enough peeking under the night's black shirt!/All day, you've been sickening with a verse."). And Ackerman's wit, quick and certainly as metaphysical as Anne Donne's husband's, flashes in a dialogue (whether real or imagined is secondary) between A. R. Ammons and herself:

> I say: did you know that from Rimbaud
> you get barium and radium, Bim, Bram,
> mab, braid, drum, dram, daub, raid?
>
> And you say: yes, and also bird & Brad,
> Baird & Mau & Ra & Maud. And axolotl
> is also good, have you tried vineyard yet?
>
> And I say: yes, and that pockmarked
> aluminum prop that we call a moon
> answers directly to Mission Control.
>
> And you say: yes, that trollop's
> on a tether of Tang; she put the rill
> in Rilke, you know what I mean?

Ackerman takes the American language to school and lets it graduate with her own unique mintage. Take this litany of evolution, for example: "I crawled out of slime/I swung through the jungles/of Madagascar;/I drew wildebeest on the caves at Lascaux,/I lived a grim life/hunting peccary and maize/in some godforsaken mudhole in the veldt." The lines do not contain a "passenger word," to use T. E. Lawrence's interesting coinage. This is a poet who is still seeking, or rather creating, her horizons. The strength of her poems, apart from what I've already said, is that her response to her subjects is total. *All of her* is in each poem, and this 'all' reveals a woman of sensitivity, restraint, ingenuity, and passionate daring.

For the poetry of Linda Pastan I have a continuing and solid—respect. Never baroque, never sentimental, never suffused with a militant feminism or any other transient *ism* that forces poetry to yield to ideology or sociology or worse. What is she then? Simply a competent poet. And not because of one or two good poems but because all her poems have a kind of uniform excellence. Now the earlier poems of *A Perfect Circle of Sun* and *Aspects of Eve* have a shelf companion in her new *The Five Stages of Grief.*[2] Her language in this new book, as in its predecessors, is spare as gristle and just as hard and, if I'm not pushing the comparison too far, just as luminous. There is not a poem in the book that does not have the succinctness of final precision, as in "Caroline": "She wore/her coming death/as gracefully/as if it were a coat/she's learned to sew./When it

[2] THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF, by *Linda Pastan.* Norton. $8.95.

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grew cold enough/she'd simply button it/and go." But succinctness is only half the story. The other and deeper half is vision. This is a woman with convictions; she is not satisfied to be mere litmus paper to the world. How can I describe this vision except to say that it is maturely Jewish in the humanistic sense in which Spinoza's vision is Jewish—an almost sophisticated mysticism leavened with wit and an awareness of the ironic. It is the very soul of the title poem as well as poems like "Self Portrait at 44" and "Because." But the one that reveals it best is "A Short History of Judaic Thought in the Twentieth Century":

> The rabbis wrote:
> although it is forbidden
> to touch a dying person
> nevertheless, if the house
> catches fire
> he must be removed
> from the house.
>
> Barbaric!
> I say,
> and whom may I touch then,
> aren't we all
> dying?
>
> You smile
> your old negotiator's smile
> and ask:
> but aren't all our houses
> burning?

Some years ago, a Swedish poet—I think it was Tomas Tranströmer—told William Stafford that his poems were simply too American to be translated. "You mean I'm too plastered to the language for that?" was Stafford's reply, and I'm sure he was smiling his best Oregon smile when he said it. The fact that Stafford is an unmistakable American poet is really a compliment to him. (Actually he *is* translatable. He appeared in the Russian and Polish issues of USIA's *America* some years ago in a project I had something to do with, and I'm sure he is known in other languages as well.) But Stafford's "American" poems exceed mere local color. His tone, his rhythms, his imagery and his themes are American in the sense that only a poet with a true American vision could create them. And that much is almost certainly untranslatable. But Stafford's human geography is certainly not restricted to mére hemispheres or continents or parts of continents. If his collected poems, *Stories That Could Be True*,[3] testify to anything, they testify to that. Here is the complete corpus to date from *Traveling Through the Dark* to the poems of last year. Like a good tree

[3] STORIES THAT COULD BE TRUE, by *William Stafford*. Harper & Row. $10.95.

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of the northwest, Stafford has grown in place. The result is stature. Take the early, elegiac lyric to "Wisteria Jones" as a touchstone of Stafford's style, and the voice in the more recent poems has the same bedrock honesty: "She used to write, ribboning our talk away,/turning it onto itself many layers/and steeping the prose hills into purple highlands,/ merely by distancing,/'Purple is the realest thing about the hills,'/she used to say—/'it's where we used to stand.'/If I met her today I'd say that now." It was Winfield Townley Scott who wrote in his posthumously published *A Dirty Hand* that American poetry exists between the linguistic parentheses of Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory" and Hart Crane's "Voyages." Stafford's language is closer to Robinson's than it is to Crane's; Stafford is not an esoteric poet any more than he is an esoteric man. His public voice, moreover, is simply and logically an extension of his ink-and-paper testaments. I've read with him and have also been in the audience on two occasions to hear him read, and he never poses, never falsifies. He is the kind of poet whom one trusts *emotionally*. Will Rogers would have admired him for that, and Stafford's readers probably admire him for the same reason. I can think of no American poet but Stafford who could write with the proper mixture of whimsy and sting "A Star in the Hills" with its built-in derision of blind faith in loyalty oaths and all the concomitant apparatus of conformity and intimidation. Nor can I name another poet but Stafford who could write as self-sacrificing and touching and magnanimous a love poem as "Passing Remark":

> In scenery I like flat country.
> In life I don't like much to happen.
>
> In personalities I like mild colorless people.
> And in colors I prefer gray and brown.
>
> My wife, a vivid girl from the mountains,
> says, "Then why did you choose me?"
>
> Mildly I lower my brown eyes—
> There are so many things admirable people do not understand.

And who but William Stafford could write in "Religion Back Home" a couplet which, despite or perhaps even because of the smile it elicits from us, has in it the essence of every war from the first tribal bloodlettings to the more recent global rumbles:

> Our Father Who art in Heaven
> can lick their Father Who art in Heaven.

Another poet who is very much like Stafford in the authenticity of his very humanity (the words are hifalutin but the meaning is not) is Ernest Sandeen. Certainly not as well known nationally as Stafford and other poets included in this chronicle (except to his students of the past three

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decades at the University of Notre Dame), Sandeen's high level of poetic achievement should command more attention now that his *Collected Poems: 1953–1977* is available.[4] What are Sandeen's subjects? Students, friends, family and, to borrow from Shakespeare, "all the parts that there adjacent lie." But regardless of subject, Sandeen invariably meets the one criterion that is for me indispensable to my estimate of a poet, and that is that he does not play a "poetry game." He does not betray or abuse his inspiration. No tricks, no shortcuts, no false attempt at "being deep," no preciousness. And he has an "eye." Let me cite as evidence the last verse from his "Parked Car":

> Breath-parched, we tossed the stubs on the night's damp floor
> and sat and sat and stared upon
> the twin progeny our love could bring to pass:
> two mites of fire smoking in the dew
> two tiny sundowns choking in the grass.

Whether he is writing about a colleague who has died ("But we salute you now as then/with love, across no greater distance/than you always kept, immaculate/and warm between yourself and us.") or the body of a woman (". . . she is the flesh she wears,/rounded breasts and buttocks,/ and the delicate cavern her thighs/spread open to, as soft as babies."), Sandeen's touch seems always to be just right. And that, at least among poets, is praise enough.

There is a somewhat mischievous notion that has existed in western literature since the Renaissance (with all due respect to Chaucer) that poetry is *essentially* related to versification, to prosody, to word arrangement on a page in a traditional or innovative way. Arrayed against this are the views of Aristotle, Coleridge and even Shelley, to name only a few. To them poetry was identified not with a medium but with what was poetic in conception regardless of medium. Drama so conceived was poetry to Aristotle; government and even architecture were poetry to Coleridge and Shelley. Some poets but not enough critics and teachers take these distinctions seriously enough. Granted, Michael Benedikt in a recent anthology called *The Prose Poem* (a somewhat defensive but, I suppose, ineluctable way of entitling such an anthology) selected a wealth of such "poems" to show just how possible they were, and in the hands of masters like Baudelaire or Chazal they are remarkable indeed. In short, I am more than sympathetic to the genre, and with receptivity as my sole credential I came to a reading of Mark Strand's *The Monument*[5] and Vern Rutsala's *Paragraphs*.[6] Strand is an author of established credentials both for his own poetry and his translations. *The Monument* is a mix of both of these aspects of his ability. The persona of the poem is addressing his future translator

[4] COLLECTED POEMS: 1953–1977, by *Ernest Sandeen*. University of Notre Dame Press. $10.00.

[5] THE MONUMENT, by *Mark Strand*. The Ecco Press. $7.95.

[6] PARAGRAPHS, by *Vern Rutsala*. Wesleyan University Press. $7.50; $3.45 paperback.

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or, as is admitted in the course of the book, his translators. There are epigraphs *in excelsis* preceding many of the individual notes or entries—from Paz, Unamuno, Shakespeare, Chekhov, Whitman, Jimenez and others. Whether they are essential to the continuity of the narrative is a question on which reasonable men can differ (I myself have mixed feelings), but in themselves the epigraphs are often as pithy as the fictionalized entries. Moreover, the symbol of the monument itself strikes me as ambivalent enough to be at once both intriguing and pretentious as a way of expressing a desire for endurance. Much less ambivalent and more poetic are some of the individual entries themselves, such as the following: "They are back, the angry poets. But look! They have come with hammers and little buckets, and they are knocking off pieces of The Monument to study and use in the making of their own small tombs." But the real monument is Strand's willingness to break new poetic ground, and one of the entries in this new book says as much: "Prose is the language of meaning so I suppose I mean what I say. I say what I say because it is prose. And so it is; describing the circle, the naught of my means, I am taking away, subtracting myself from my words. My blank prose travels into the future, its freight the fullness of zero, the circumference of absence. And it misses something, something I remember I wanted. Soon I shall disappear into the well of want, the *lux* of lack."

The "prose poems" of Vern Rutsala in *Paragraphs* strike me as being among the best I've ever read by anyone, and I include in this somewhat sweeping statement the work of Chazal, Jules Renard, René Char and Francis Ponge. Like Strand, Rutsala proves again and again in this little book that poetry is indeed in the conception and not the medium, and he does it better than Strand in that there are fewer loose ends or areas of opacity. On the first page of the book Rutsala writes what amounts to his credo for the entire work: "The Paragraph is a prose poem, but it is also related to the fable, the aphorism, the maxim, the character, and the joke, and may draw energy from the ghosts of those forms in the way free verse is said to rely on the hint of traditional meter." Everything that follows validates that credo to the letter. Since the best proof is by example, here are a few proofs: "You rise to speak, confident, calm, certain of the impact of your wisdom—unwise courses will be altered, inane policies reversed—but suddenly, as if a virus had hit you, you stammer, your thoughts cloud, you perspire, and, confused and embarrassed, you speak too quickly, badly garbling what you intended to say, apologize and sit down. What creates this effect? It is the change in attitude one experiences when rising from a sitting position."—"You ask what was wrong? Why did you talk that way? I have no answers. It was morning, summer, the newspaper lay spread like a map on the table. It sent me in odd directions. I had to say something."—"You flinch at their cold eyes on dust jackets or across waiting rooms tapping their feet impatiently and staring as you try to sit quietly, only cradling your magazine, never reading, never even daring to flutter the pages. True professionals, they never smile as they sell you bus tickets and breath mints, counting out your change like bullets."

John Hollander is a widely published poet and critic, and Atheneum

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has now issued his new and selected poems under the title of *Spectral Emanations*.[7] Almost to the poem, this is the work of an intellectual. I have no quarrel with Hollander's intellectuality per se. Like Richard Howard and James Merrill, Hollander is a man of almost over-demonstrated erudition. Perhaps it is this very erudition (consider the title of the book as one manifestation, for example) that makes his poems cast more light than heat. If Auden were still alive, he would almost assuredly be foursquare behind this book as he was behind Hollander's *A Crackling of Thorns* when he selected it in the Yale Series of Younger Poets some years back. But to me the world of intellectualized feeling, which is Hollander's world as it frequently was Auden's, is a world rendered unfeelable through inspissation. I could cite example after example from the early to the more recent poems of Hollander, but the effort would merely belabor the point. My lack of sympathy for poems of this cut may be due to a bias in taste. If so, I readily admit my failing. But it just could be rooted in the fact that poetry is by nature more than architectonic versifying no matter how brilliant or learned the versifying may be. The ideas in Hollander's poems shine like rhinestones, and that is probably the trouble. The experience of the ideas is subordinated to the presentation of the ideas, and in poetry the reverse is what is required. For this reason Hollander's work strikes me as work done from the eyebrows up. No matter how much I try to admire it for what it is, it leaves me cold. It's reminiscent of the Audenesque dictum in his elegy to Yeats that "poetry makes nothing happen." That statement, however silly it seems in itself, has a sterilizing effect on poetic inspiration from the outset, and the intellectualization of feelings has the identical hermetic effect.

Before A. R. Ammons became associated with the W. W. Norton Company, the Cornell University Press published his *Selected Poems* in 1968. Then came Norton and the awards and other books, including the *Collected Poems: 1951–1971*. The *Collected Poems,* as I've written elsewhere, was a good but extremely congested book with poem after poem literally crammed into every bit of space that would take print. Now in Norton's new *Selected Poems: 1951–1977,*[8] there is a sense of breadth that is reminiscent of the earlier Cornell edition, and the taste of the selector in Ammons is evident from front to back cover. Much has been said and written of Ammons' sensitivity to natural surroundings and of his genuine ecological concerns, and the poems in this selection certainly are further confirmation of his credentials. He knows the exact difference between "brush oak" and "aspen," "hollybush" and "flowering quince," "Spirea" and "clover." If it is true that every poet's home country is the country of his poems, Ammons' country is still the world of Corson's Inlet. It is to him what Yoknapawtapha was to Faulkner, the Isle of Pines to Hart Crane, Vermont and New Hampshire to Robert Frost. And he is absolutely at home there so that the natural imagery in his poetry is constitutive to his vision and never prop-like imagery in an otherwise urbanized perspective. Like

[7] SPECTRAL EMANATIONS, by *John Hollander*. Atheneum. $12.50; $7.95 paperback.
[8] SELECTED POEMS: 1951–1977, by *A. R. Ammons*. Norton. $7.95.

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the poetry of the Indians of the Americas, Ammons' poems are on speaking terms with nature. Here in "Photosynthesis" is as good an example as any:

> The sun's wind
> blows the fire
> green, sails the
> chloroplasts,
> lifts banks, bogs,
> boughs into flame:
> the green ash of
> yellow loss.

Ammons is so good an observer of his own and our ambience that I have for years put aside my reservations about his inclination to work into his poetry a vocabulary that includes "entropy," "rulelessness," "relevance," "synthesis," "discontinuities" and so forth. They are in the very grain of his poetic alphabet as "dulcet" and "halcyon" are in the lexicon of Richard Wilbur. In context, my reservations notwithstanding, the words somehow work for Ammons as they do for Wilbur. But look as I have through the entire selection of Ammons' inclusions from 1951 to 1977, I am disturbed by one obvious absence, and to my knowledge no critical reader of Ammons' work has yet noted it. That absence is *man*, or rather men and women with names, identities and all the other fragilities, strengths, joys, griefs, flaws, glories, spit, bone, blood and scars that come with the franchise. This is not to denigrate Ammons' achievement in any way. After all, Thoreau in his Walden days had a vision similar to Ammons', and *Walden* remains a classic of its kind. But *Walden* is a classic work of retreat, a memo-journal of a three-year interlude before Thoreau learned that retreats were by definition temporary. If the perimeter of Ammons' world is ultimately the world of animate and inanimate nature, it seems destined to share the dignity and the limitations of the world of Walden. But there is recent evidence that Ammons has staked out new ground. A long poem of his entitled "Summer Place" appeared in the Summer 1977 issue of this Review, and it pulses with the presence of flesh and blood. Based on this poem alone, this is ground from which Ammons should derive a good yield.

Some mention should be made of the appearance of Karl Shapiro's *Collected Poems: 1940–1978*.[9] This is a voluminous book with selections from *Person, Place and Thing* through *Adult Bookstore*. If I say that Shapiro is the Gershwin of mid-century American poetry, I hope that I am not misunderstood. Like Gershwin, Shapiro impresses immediately, but somehow one is more impressed than moved. Except for one of Shapiro's poems, "Scyros," I find few that do not impress me as having been tamed into the past tense before they were written out on the page.

Richard Pevear has had his work published in a selective small group of

[9] COLLECTED POEMS: 1940–1978, by *Karl Shapiro*. Random House. $15.00.

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good journals; *Night Talk* is his first book.[10] Speaking in words of one syllable, I can say that there is not a bad page in it. In fact, the poems have a restraint and straight candor about them that are sufficient to establish Pevear, to use de Gaulle's phrase, as a serious man, that is, not a somber man but a man to be taken seriously. The impression I receive is of poems that are actually quarried into being. Moreover, Pevear has a fine traditional sense so that his work, even when purely personal, eschews the hermeticism and "in-tone" of the merely private. And his eye and his ear are invariably unfailing. Take these verses from the first of his "Two Russian Goat Songs," for example:

> No divination in these pools.
> Yeasted with earth, black decay
> Works at the paring of a rich season.
> This is the god's sign: lightness of view
>
> And the heavy breath of the earth. Imagine
> What futures the Romans argued for themselves
> In the fifth century. In the sixth
> Century goats are grazing in the Forum.

The pacing and cut of these lines is first rate; look anywhere in the book, and there is the same even quality. And when Pevear finds the subject that is right for him—*just* for him—, the result, as in "The Gardener," is one of the finest lyrics that I've read in some time:

> There is more order and the order more visible
> In cultivated fields than in free nature.
> I don't make the order, I make it appear.
> One day my flesh will turn the color of this earth,
> My veins choke with roots, my eyes sprout lilies,
> Between my hands and the ordainer of things
> Perfectly blue sky, perfectly green trees.

Now that Richard Hugo has taken over from Stanley Kunitz as the sole judge of the Yale Series of Younger Poets, there was some expectation, as there usually is with a change of judges, about the new awardee. Bin Ramke is that awardee, and Hugo has chosen well.[11] Every poem tends to be different in appearance as well as in tone. Just when you get used to Ramke's way of seeing in one poem, he changes keys in the next. The overall effect of this diversification is a *plus* primarily because Ramke's virtues as a poet are more clearly delineated in this chromatic scale of his

[10] NIGHT TALK, by *Richard Pevear*. Princeton University Press. $7.50.
[11] THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NIGHT AND DAY, by *Bin Ramke*. Yale University Press. $7.95; $2.95 paperback.

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poems to date. For clarity, there is the following section from "Living Near Any Ocean: Insomnia and Guilt":

> If pardon were possible, if it were,
> it would come at night under a partial moon
> on a beach white as bone, cold;
> nothing under the world's sun gleams
> more elegant than a jet plane,
> a machine long and lean-boned
> like razors fitted in a velvet case:
> nothing is clean but war and music.

For poignance there is a beautiful father-and-daughter fugue called "Two Versions of History," and for that enigmatic calm that is so hard to create in the midst of a poem there is "A Nod toward True Love and Fidelity" with its reverberating last stanza:

> I bow my head: I am a man of passion, guilty
> as the day is long, guiltier—this turgid guilt
> is more like night, dark and wet and warm
> in the breezes of remembered childhood.
> There is more to this than life:
> in the kitchen I eat figs for breakfast,
> strange birds call, hidden in the sky.

Under the editorship of Desmond Graham, Oxford University Press has now brought out *The Complete Poems of Keith Douglas*.[12] This edition contains the whole corpus of Douglas' poetry from the poems written in the thirties about Guildford, Gorizia and Oxford to the later war poems and fragments that Douglas wrote before he was killed in his twenty-fourth year near St. Pierre in Normandy. It would be no disservice to Douglas to say that he is to World War II among British poets what Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke were to World War I. In fact, the similarities of temperament are so strong among the three men that I for one felt almost a sense of repetition. Like Owen and Brooke, Douglas wrote romantic and pastoral lyrics before war made him the poet he truly became. Whether there is something uniquely British in this pattern of poetic development, I don't know, but the pattern is of a type. (It's like reading Yeats before and then after the agony of Ireland shifted him from nostalgia to greatness.) Here is one verse from a poem Douglas wrote in 1935:

> I have looked through the pine trees
> cooling their sunwarmed needles in the night
> I saw the moon's face, white,
> beautiful as the breeze.

[12] THE COMPLETE POEMS OF KEITH DOUGLAS, edited by *Desmond Graham*. Oxford University Press. $9.95.

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Here is a stanza written a war later by Douglas. The tiredness and almost cynical melancholy that resulted from Douglas' long service in the Middle East are etched into every word:

> To stand here in the wings of Europe
> disheartened, I have come away
> from the sick land where in the sun lay
> the gentle sloe-eyed murderers
> of themselves, exquisites under a curse;
> here to exercise my depleted fury.

Douglas wrote this poem, "On a Return from Egypt," in April of 1944. Two months later he was dead. A year earlier he had written a poetic credo that his later poems really achieved: "But my object . . . is to write true things . . . I see no reason to be either musical or sonorous about things at present . . . perhaps one day cynic and lyric will meet and make me a balanced style."

The past few months have seen the publication of several excellent translations, and a few deserve special mention to conclude this chronicle. The book that impressed me most for both the delicacy and lyricism of its renditions was *Sanskrit Love Poetry*, by W. S. Merwin and J. Moussaieff Masson.[13] Printed *en face* for those few who are capable or even desirous of reading the originals in Sanskrit, these poems have the laudable shamelessness of frank eroticism. Merwin as a translator has always had a commendable sense of measure in re-creating foreign poems into American, and, assuming that the final versions of these Sanskrit lyrics are his, he is at his best in this book. In fact I think that this is his best work since his remarkable translation of Antonio Porchia.

Another impressive translation—impressive in itself and equally impressive because the poet, Nazim Hikmet, is impressive—is *The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin.*[14] Hikmet is to modern Turkish poetry what Ritsos is to the Greeks and Neruda to the Latin Americans. Politically he bore the scars of his convictions, but he was able to transmute his sufferings from prolonged imprisonment into some of the most stirring and searing poems of this century. And his young translators have caught his passion as they did several years ago in his *Things I Didn't Know I Loved.*

Finally comes José Emilio Pacheco's *Don't Ask Me How the Time Goes By: Poems, 1964–1968*[15] in a translation by Alastair Reid. Reid's work as a translator is further enhanced by this book, and in Pacheco he seems to have found a poet with whom he is temperamentally in tune. These are modern poems in the best sense, that is, poems without echoes in an idiom that is as immediate and attractive (and I mean this as a straight com-

[13] SANSKRIT LOVE POETRY, translated by *W. S. Merwin* and *J. Moussaieff Masson.* Columbia University Press. $15.00.

[14] THE EPIC OF SHEIK BEDREDDIN, by *Nazim Hikmet*, translated by *Randy Blasing* and *Mutlu Konuk.* Persea. $4.95.

[15] DON'T ASK ME HOW THE TIME GOES BY: POEMS, 1964–1968, by *José Emilio Pacheco*, translated by *Alastair Reid.* Columbia University Press. $5.95.

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pliment) as gossip. But Pacheco's poetry is nonetheless profound, and, when the subject demands it, suffused with a tragic sense of the Mexican past, as in "Chronicle from the Indies":

> After sailing far on the dark and threatening sea
> we discovered
> land abounding in metals, cities
> never described by the imagination, riches,
> men who knew neither shotguns nor horses.
> Keeping in mind the spreading of the faith
> and freeing them from their brutish, inhuman ways,
> we razed their temples and delivered death
> to any native who stood up to us.
> To keep them from temptation,
> we confiscated their gold;
> to teach them humility,
> we branded them with fire and put them in irons.
> May God bless this undertaking
> done in his Name.

Literature and Society in Imperial Russia, 1800-1914

Edited by William Mills Todd III. Ranging in topic from general discussions of literary theory to close readings of well-known literary works, these nine papers treat nearly every literary movement of the period, and a number of major Russian writers, including Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, and Dostoevsky. The result is an approach to Russian literature that neglects neither the dynamics of social interaction nor the forms and traditions of literature. $17.50

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PETER SERCHUK

James Wright: The Art of Survival

> "No matter what anybody thinks about it, I know this book is final. God damn me if I ever write another."
>
> —James Wright speaking of his book *Two Citizens* in a *Paris Review* interview.

How very fortunate we are in this year 1978 still to have James Wright among us. Even more fortunate is the fact that James Wright is still writing poems, still confiding in us, his countrymen, the necessity of survival. It can't be easy for him. So many of his closest friends are dead from either alcohol or suicide and a great many more either atrophied or dispassionate. Yet here is Wright, surrounded by ghosts living and dead, one of only a handful of true survivors still *crooning his tears*, as he once wrote, *for fifty cents a line.*

In his newest collection of poems and prose pieces, *To a Blossoming Pear Tree,*[1] what James Wright actually gives us is a rumination on survival, a personal retrospect on what it means to live and write in this country, to crawl through the cracks of an America so beautiful yet seemingly so bent on destroying its own beauty:

> It turns out
> You can kill them.
> It turns out
> You can make the earth absolutely clean.
>
> "Redwings"

In this regard the book is not unlike *Two Citizens* in which Wright moved from a passionate hate to an accepting love for his homeland ("That brutal and savage place whom I still love"). And yet, this book moves beyond the other in the way it extends outward, becomes a more intimate expression of allegiances, presents a clearer acceptance of the continual death/resurrection process as a means of keeping one's spiritual and physical frayed ends intact. In this regard Wright feels a special kinship with the elf owl who crawls into the cactus tree at night in the alien company of the roadrunner, the diamond-back, and the tarantula. Outcasts all of them, Wright feels at home in their gathering:

> I got thirsty in the factories,
> And I hated the brutal dry suns there,
> So I quit
>
> You were the shadow
> Of a hallway
> In me.

[1] TO A BLOSSOMING PEAR TREE, by James Wright. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $7.95.

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I have never gone through that door,
But the elf owl's face
Is inside me.

Saguaro,
You are not one of the gods.
Your green arms lower and gather me.
I am an elf owl's shadow, a secret
Member of your family.
"To the Saguaro Cactus Tree in the Desert Rain"

Yet however strong Wright's trustings in the natural order of plants and animals (like Roethke's, for example), his stronger affinity has always been with the outcasts of the "human city," those fallen angels and bowery saints thwarted and beaten by a system of mechanized namelessness who, with nothing to live for except life itself, suffer their humiliation and still manage to offer up a blessing. In the beautiful poem "Hook" Wright recalls a Sioux giving him bus fare in Minneapolis years ago:

Did you ever feel a man hold
Sixty-five cents
In a hook,
And place it
Gently
In your freezing hand?

I took it.
It wasn't the money I needed.
But I took it.
"Hook"

What perhaps most distinguishes Wright's voice in this book from that of his previous collections is its authority of middle-age, its active acceptance of a tottering world along with the well-seasoned understanding that among the rubbled debris there is always some sustaining beauty to be found, however difficult it may be to recognize. This is not the green voice of pompous cynicism or the retreating voice of sterilizing fear. In a wonderful prose piece Wright describes a scoutmaster from his boyhood:

> . . . he knew damned well what would become of most of us, and it sure did, and he knew it, and he loved us anyway. The very name America often makes me sick, and yet Ralph Neal was an American. The country is enough to drive you crazy.
>
> "The Flying Eagles of Troop 62"

In this manner Wright is counting the scars (for every scar a lesson learned) instead of watching them bleed helplessly. Whereas before he

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was fighting for survival through the complexities of national and personal pain, now he has moved one step beyond, fighting his way towards a definition of love. With this realization Wright is no longer persecuted by his own mortality but bravely accepts the fact that the work must go on, though it will always remain unfinished:

> I am happy enough to sit in this park alone now. I turn my own face toward the river Adige. A little wind flutters off the water and brushes past me and returns.
>
> It is all right with me to know that my life is only one life. I feel like the light of the river Adige.
>
> By this time, we are both an open secret.
>
> "The Secret of Light"

From a writer of less intensity some of the pieces in this book might seem a bit sentimental, perhaps overly self-conscious, but even in his most carefree moments Wright's words carry the scent of the dead he has buried, his rhythms are filled with the "dark blood" of those ghosts living and dead who have not survived. Aware of the price he has paid and aware that he has survived while others, some greater than himself, have fallen, he is now free to gather the past, to return once again to his native Ohio. Here he offers up his own blessing:

> I know what we call it
> Most of the time.
> But I have my own song for it,
> And sometimes, even today,
> I call it beauty.
>
> "Beautiful Ohio"

We are indeed fortunate to be here to accept the poet's blessing. We are indeed fortunate in this year 1978 still to have James Wright among us. God damn him if he never writes another.

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JAMES FINN COTTER

Whispers of the Word

"WHAT DO YOU TURN TO FIRST IN AN ISSUE?" we were asked in the Readers' Survey in the Spring issue of this Review. After due reflection, I checked off "book reviews." If you are like me, you began reading this issue right here, not because of the author (who is he anyway?) but because in the back pages of such quarterlies—often in smaller print and with narrower margins—we readers can play catch-up with the vast world of books. The publishing scene comes momentarily in focus; we enjoy the view and may even plan a visit. Good reviewers are our reader-guides who take our place, talk back, agree or argue, reason and reflect through these crammed, panoramic back pages.

Laurence Lieberman is a poet, who has published two volumes of poems, and a poetry critic. It is as a reviewer of books that we meet him in this volume, a collection of long and short articles on a number of contemporary poets.[1] I find it strange to be reviewing a book of book reviews which, removed from the terrain of the periodical back pages, look either desolate or overgrown, unfamiliar and lost. People collect their published poems, plays, stories, and essays, but few bother to put reviews between hardcovers. True, T. S. Eliot, Edmund Wilson, Randall Jarrell, and others managed to transform the occasional review into a permanent essay, but reviews are of their time, place, and circumstance. Their impermanence gives them their significance and freedom.

Despite my misgivings, I am drawn to this book. Lieberman is a master poetry reviewer who lives with the books he writes about—sometimes as long as a year. He selects only those authors for whom he feels empathy or who offer him a challenge of understanding. I have had but two months with his volume of criticism, but I share his enthusiasm for today's poetry and I believe he is correct in seeing new frontiers of consciousness opening up in the best poems now being written. For Lieberman, poets are the pioneers of the American experience and readers are the settlers who follow. He would act as our guide through the freshly unfolding landscape, pointing out landmarks to make sure that next time we find the way ourselves.

Other metaphors for Lieberman's undertaking occur to me. He is an old prospector who allows no poetic gold to slip through his trained hands; he is the master mechanic whose expert ear and touch fine-tune the poem until it is perfectly running. His own metaphor, borrowed from a phrase of John Ashbery's, involves listening to word frequencies transmitted over unseen radio waves. Lieberman is our ham operator picking up signals from far-away places, unjamming, filtering, and deciphering the messages which the Just, as Auden says, exchange in the night. The reader-reviewer dedicates himself completely to the service of the transmitters in order to

[1] UNASSIGNED FREQUENCIES: AMERICAN POETRY IN REVIEW, 1964–77, by *Laurence Lieberman.* University of Illinois Press. $12.00.

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enter perfectly into the poet's measure, "to adjust the scale of [his] cerebral ear to the pitch of each author's voice."

Happy the poet to have such an unselfish, sensitive listener! The list includes many important contemporary poets, forty-five in all. But is the list "representative," as Lieberman claims? Consider some of the omissions: Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Bly, Philip Booth, Donald Hall, David Ignatow, Denise Levertov, Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, and Louis Simpson. Given the critic's premise of hearing with the inner ear, the blasts of the Beats might naturally be missing, but Kenneth Rexroth and Gary Snyder have wide enough ranges to deserve some mention. No, this collection is limited by its origins, the work on assignment, the chronicle and the commentary, the power and the pathos of book reviewing.

The most satisfying reviews in this volume are the extended ones on Ammons, Dickey, Merwin, Strand, and Wagoner. The opening piece on John Ashbery possesses many of Lieberman's critical strong points: close reading, patient explication, paraphrase, repetition, summary; but it has the weakness of its subject matter as well: over-refined allusiveness, belabored style, and unconvincing argument. Frustrating in its effort to be illuminating, exhausting in its exhaustiveness, the article strains toward a simple restatement of Ashbery's most abstruse lines and imagery and ends with an appeal for a broader audience for this kind of poetry. Here Lieberman at his earnest best is at his objective worst; he is eager to make everything clear when little makes sense, and his refusal to admit any problems in the material quoted or any alternatives to his own interpretations results in a mouse where he finds a mountain. After almost sixty pages, Lieberman fails to convince me that his claim for Ashbery's revolutionary tactics, universality, and spiritual questing exists in the poetry and not in his own imagination. The critic becomes carried away with his own cause, seeing the poet as "today's providential artist—as if sent by Providence, a special configuration of the planet's orchestrating over Ashbery's birth in the 'Holy Land' of Western New York State." Ashbery is the underground man who will somehow change society not by his words but by his mere presence, by the suggestions his words create in his listeners, by the irrational revolution his poems represent.

In "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," Ashbery writes that we will be transformed by "whispers out of time,"

> Whispers of the word that can't be understood
> But can be felt, a chill, a blight
> Moving outward along the capes and peninsulas
> Of your nervures and so to the archipelagoes
> And to the bathed, aired secrecy of the open sea.

Lieberman comments:

> The *whispers* would revive the dormant spirit of the American outlander in us, that pilgrim explorer impulse that went to sleep after the mythic West had been tamed and domesticated. The wilderness—ostensibly decimated—has merely been driven underground, sunk into dormancy.

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NOVEL: A FORUM ON FICTION

Volume 11, Number 3 Spring, 1978

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FRANZ K. STANZEL
Towards a Grammar of Fiction

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> The whispers would send us back to the buried wilderness, the forgotten—but not obliterated—primeval American heartland which is celebrated and vindicated in the last far outcry of Faulkner's best prose, as in the *Far Field* of Roethke's eloquent last meditations ("Old men should be explorers").

Obviously, the critic is having his say, the poem notwithstanding. The eloquent thesis has been propped by wishful thinking rather than by any analysis; the gratutitous benediction of Faulkner and Roethke reveals the weakness of the basic argument. Suspicious non-sequiters also appear to bolster Lieberman's claims:

> Following his years of service as executive editor of *Art News* (1965–72), it is not surprising that Ashbery's aesthetic canons are tempered by the professional art critic's inveterate suspiciousness of standards, trends, prevailing fashions, with strong predilections for standards of austerity and elegance derived from the timeless classics.

Maybe, but there are good reasons for believing that the opposite happens to be true.

Anyone reading the Ashbery review will learn a good deal about the poet's methods of image association, hidden meanings, and use of tradition, but he or she will discover more about Lieberman's own quest for a unifying consciousness of spirit and word. He calls attention to a passage in which Ashbery describes the surprising presence of a snowfall, and for the moment we forgive him all the ratiocinating and rhetoric. He has seen and lived the moment and we are entirely with the poet and reader "in specks and sparkles of snow." Whether it all adds up to the visionary dream Lieberman so passionately advocates will depend on each reader. I, for one, wish the prose had the precision and objectivity of some of the later articles in the book; there is too much "enchanted being," "vivacious grand drama of dawning awareness," and "broad canvas of this sumptuous masterwork" for my taste. The concluding image of Ashbery as "an ordinary skilled laboring man of our own day" has been bravely fought for, but strikes me as the reverse of the truth.

James Dickey might lay better claim to such a title, and Lieberman works hard to prove the opposite: he is a "worldly mystic," a man "who has been picked by some mysterious, intelligent agent in the universe to act out a secret destiny." The author, who edited *The Achievement of James Dickey* (the introduction appears here as "The Deepening of Being"), emphasizes Dickey's ability to identify with people and animals in dramatic monologues. His analysis of "Power and Light," "The Firebombing," "Falling," "Tree House," "The Heaven of Animals," and "The Sheep Child" combine an accurate eye for shifts of style and detail with an intuitive empathy for the poet's developing emotions. Later in the book, Liberman dubs Dickey—along with Berryman and Stafford—an "expansional poet," one who explores new horizons of self through the actual writing of his poems so that he enlarges both his own personality and the experiences of humanity by expanding the forms and rhythms of

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PRISM international will be twenty years old next year, and we are planning to make a few changes in celebration of the occasion. As a first step, we are devoting a series of special issues to poetry, prose, and possibly drama, written by Canadians under thirty years of age. Essays and statements by Canadian writers will also be included.

In the course of its career, *PRISM international* has published many of Canada's foremost writers when they were first appearing in print. Some of these were: Margaret Atwood, George Bowering, Michael Ondaatje, John Newlove, and Margaret Laurence. But this will be the first time we have set out to concentrate exclusively on a new generation of writers.

With this series, *PRISM* will continue to reflect and explore the changing scene of contemporary Canadian literature. You are invited to help us celebrate.

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poetry. The poem begins as a new sound in the ear and ends with transporting vision. The good critic has retraced the same path.

Dickey appears in four of Lieberman's chapters; another favored poet, A. R. Ammons, in three. One of Lieberman's chief beliefs involves the role of dreams in the changing awareness of spirit and reality which marks our times. The poet makes visible and audible images that exist below the level of our waking life. Ammons particularly has the ability to call attention to objects caught in flight, the ephemeral yet dream-like flower, the archetypal tree. The world he describes is not his but ours. The critic seeks shape in the poem's search for its own dimensions that mimic the motions of nature. The poetic spirit activates the reader to a similar response and, in Ammons' case, even the stillness and silence work toward this final effect. According to Lieberman, Ezra Pound advocated "the poem of permanence, the indestructible art-object," while Ammons "prefers the poem as a way of being, of being in touch."

This valuable metaphor recurs in the article on William Stafford whose poem, "Touches," summarizes Lieberman's theme of communication beyond words of timeless, ancient, and abundant being. "You put a hand out in the dark of a cave," Stafford writes, "and/the wall waits for your fingers." Lieberman exclaims: "It is the transcendent grace of the hand's gentlest touch, and of the listener's marvelously intense hearing, that achieves penetration into spheres of reality the mind cannot enter." The poet and his reviewer in this instance keep precisely in tune. Again, in Frederick Morgan's poetry, the critic finds the same love for accurate detail wedded to a religious quest. In Morgan's love poems especially, the poetry can step away from its own sense of ecstasy to speak of "a supernatural radiance . . . such as we suppose may be afforded only to ghosts returning from the dead." In these three poets—Ammons, Stafford, and Morgan—Lieberman admires the lucidity and transparency of style that his own best prose passages reflect.

The metaphor of the journey which runs through *Unassigned Frequencies* culminates in the review of David Wagoner's verse. This chapter—not previously published—examines the *Collected Poems, 1956–1976* with better balance and judgment than any other in the book. The themes of survival in a hostile environment, of a loving response to natural surroundings, and of using one's senses to find the way, all come together in the man-animal-poet protagonist of Wagoner's work. A strong kinship between reviewer and author shines through in the rhythm of quotation and commentary, and in the buoyancy of the prose style. Here the critic feels free to point out weaknesses (in "Meeting the Bear," for example) and poetic inconsistencies, but he learns to rely on his woodsman guide and to develop "The discipline and art of readership." In "Tracking," Wagoner warns:

> . . . in this empty country
> You must learn to read
> What you've never read before: the minute language
> Of moss and lichen,
> The signals of bent grass, the speech of sand,
> The gestures of dust.

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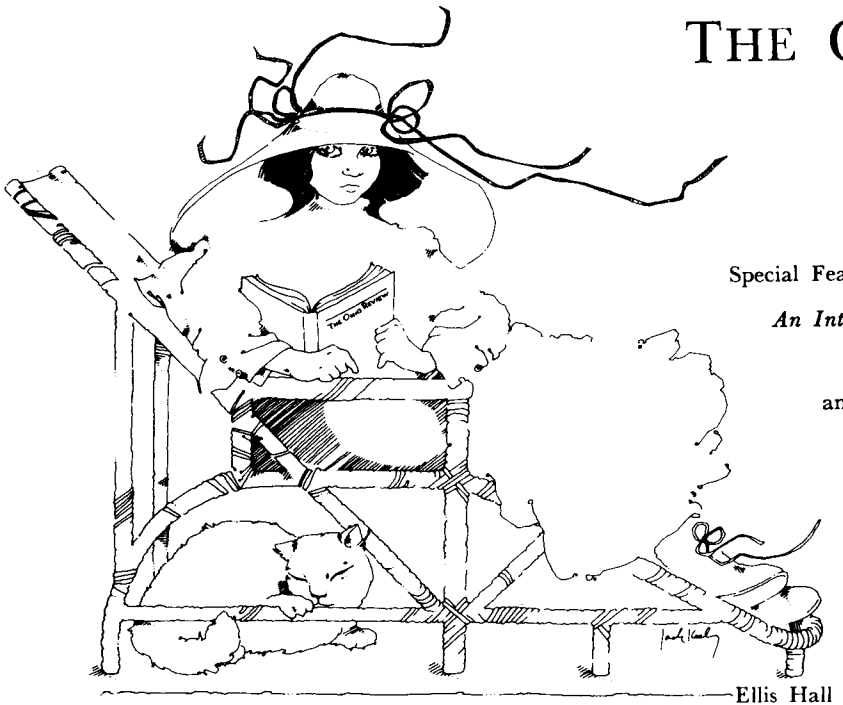
THE OHIO REVIEW

Spring/Summer 1978 $2.50



Special Feature

An Interview with **Shinkichi Takahashi**
by **Lucien Stryk**

and with a chapbook of poems by
Michael Sheridan

Ellis Hall Ohio University Athens, Ohio 45701

Lieberman may have been in over his head in the Ashbery piece, but he has his feet on the ground in his semantic analysis of Wagoner's language and logistics. Coming to terms with the "dirt that won't take no for an answer," we become readers who survive and renew the spirit through nature, needing words to preserve the legend of the way and to record the story of the sun, rain, and trees. We learn to cherish spoken words in poetry exploring new idioms and yet rooted in common speech. The risk has been taken and accepted:

> When you take a step, whatever you ask to bear you
> Is bearing your life . . .
>
> "From Here to There"

Lieberman comments: "Wagoner's calm authority in these lines is a serenity of earned arrival, a power to face the future and the reality of death with undiminished bravery, conserving and bearing up under his full human and artistic allotment in every step."

I wish this collection of reviews began with the Wagoner rather than the Ashbery review, but Lieberman unnecessarily tied himself to an alphabetical ordering of his survey. The practice is obtrusive in the middle section where twenty-eight poets are marshaled in encyclopedic fashion from W. H. Auden to Miller Williams. Whatever thematic unity and purpose the author conceived for his study collapses at this onslaught of names: no one receives more than four pages of comment. Statements reviewers make in the heat of discovery look out of date, like this opening sentence which should have remained buried in the *Yale Review*: "If there is any book today that has perfectly captured the peculiar spiritual agony of our time, the agony of a generation which knows itself to be the last, and has transformed that agony into great art, it is W. S. Merwin's *The Lice*." Ten years, or even ten months, later few can agree with such generalities—even Merwin has left that earlier stance and style behind. Lieberman's hyperboles at times embarrass me, as when he writes of Jean Garrigue's "The Grand Canyon": "The work explores a fantastic inundation from the outside world that becomes mysteriously and helplessly transformed into a metaphor for the world of the psyche, with no loss of the geological marvel's exact multitudinous particularity of detail." These purple sentences may add a brilliant swatch of color, but I fail to see what Lieberman had in mind. Reviews that have been cut down to size and arranged to form an alphabetical collection make no sense at all.

If *Unassigned Frequencies* had concentrated on its main purpose of tracking the spiritual direction poets are beginning to write about, it would have been a major contribution to modern critical study. Unfortunately, the author chose to compromise by forcing old and new reviews into a Procrustean bed. What is needed is further clarification of what Lieberman means by his insistence on the emergence of a "new species of poetic identity." His effort to define the frontiers of awareness and the nature of the whispered word is admirable, but it lacks the specificity of his literary criticism. Descriptions of the "wisdom of being," "mysterious heart of

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things," "inner landscape," and "true heartland of the self" call for philosophical or theological extrapolation if we are to follow Lieberman's lead into this virgin land. He would answer that this journey cannot be separated from the poetry itself since he insists that the gestures of the word are embedded in the strata of each poem. The critic's task, however, draws us deeper into that bedrock to provide us with a clearer idea of what the convergence of this mythopoeic search signifies for all of us. What is the nature of this "revolution"? Is poetry our future religion? Is it a revival of Platonism? of Christianity? of Gnosticism? Something more definite must be said if we are to grasp the pattern Lieberman so convincingly finds present in contemporary poetry.

One possibility I see for exploration is the traditional role of the poet as *vates*, a prophet who speaks obscure truths in concrete symbols and inspired rhythm. For Philip Sidney this kind of poetry aspired to the highest achievements of classical and biblical verse: "For these be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be: but range, onely rayned with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be, and should be." Because "these indeede doo meerely make to imitate," they create purer sounds and demarcations of the Word unheard and invisible: "I call to it Nameless One," W. S. Merwin writes in "Gift,"

> nomad live with me
> be my eyes
> my tongue and my hands
> my sleep and my rising
> out of chaos
> come and be given

Lieberman dwells on the "serenity and happiness of earned spiritual independence" expressed in these lines. For such moments, we require no definitions, only gratitude to the poet and to his listener resonating and reviewing the wholeness "of what may be, and should be."

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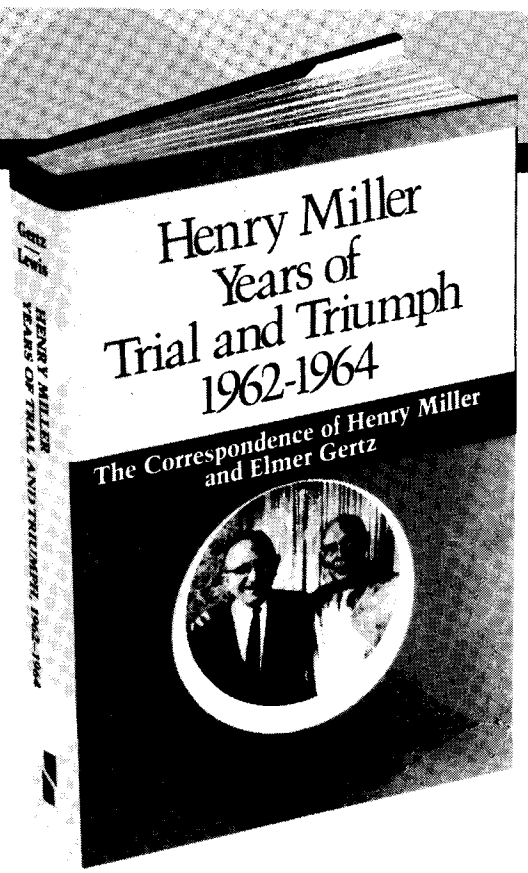

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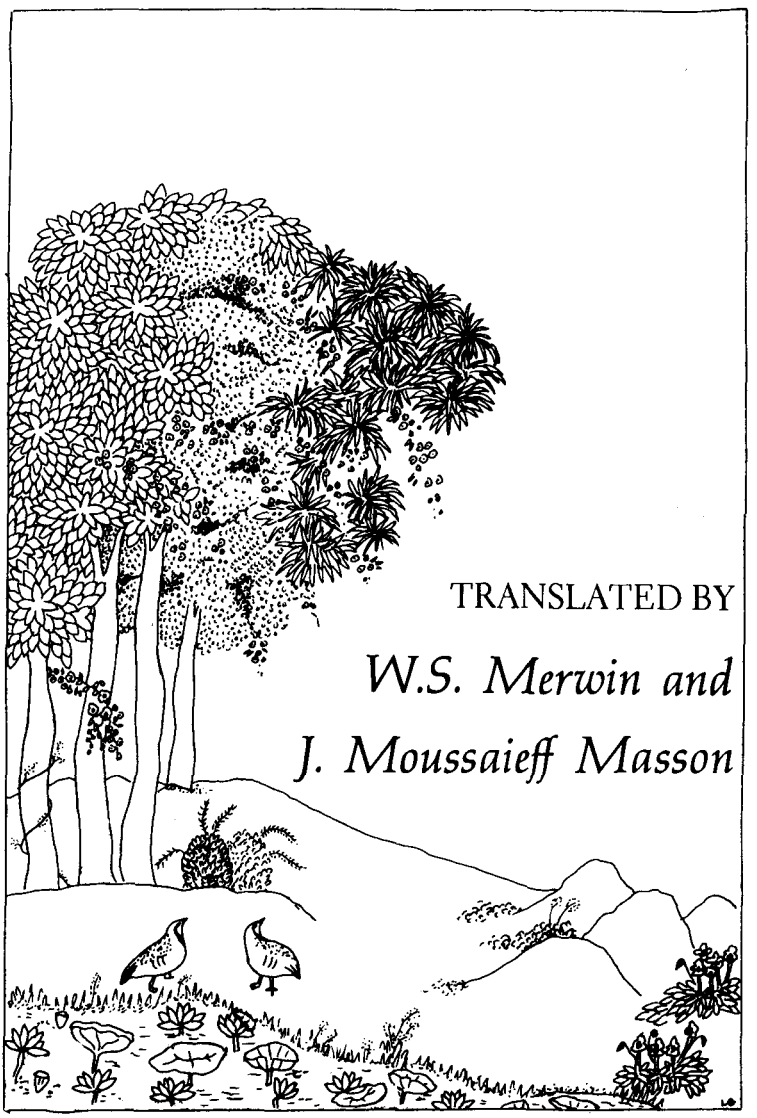

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